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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

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New York

President:	Mr. Delattre	(France)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Mahmoud
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/532)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/532)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Sweden and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Chargé d'affaires of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I would like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2016/532, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

Before giving the floor to Mr. Haysom, I would like to take this opportunity, as this will be his final briefing to the Council as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to thank him warmly for his outstanding service. The Council wishes him every success in his future endeavours.

I now give the floor to Mr. Haysom.

Mr. Haysom: In my previous statement to the Security Council in March (see S/PV.7645) I said that in 2016 the survival of the National Unity Government would be an achievement. I stressed that the Government had to overcome five distinct hurdles to prevail. The Government would need to tackle a potent conflation of political, economic and security challenges. To do so, it would also need to face two additional challenges, namely, that of securing medium-term financial and military assistance from the international communityand that of making headway in laying the foundation for an effective peace process. A failure to overcome any of those distinct hurdles could have significant consequences for the country.

This is not to downplay the real progress that Afghanistan has made over the past decade, especially, for example, in education, human right, and especially women's rights, and in the emergence of a vibrant, democratic culture. That progress is widely acknowledged, and rightly so. Rather, the objective was to draw attention to the formidable obstacles that Afghanistan faces and to underline the need for a concerted response to the challenges from all stakeholders, including the international community.

I am pleased to note that there have been positive steps in meeting some of those five challenges since I last addressed the Council. On the economic front, we have noted progress in revenue collection, in meeting International Monetary Fund benchmarks and in developing thoughtful medium-term plans for reform and for economic development under difficult conditions. There has also been distinct progress in the management of public finances. And, as we did only two years ago, we do not fear an imminent default in civil-service salary payments.

We should acknowledge some of the milestones that have been reached on some of the most ambitious projects, developed in collaboration with other countries in the region. The past month has seen the inauguration of the Salma hydroelectric dam, the CASA 1000 electricity project and a trilateral economic agreement among Afghanistan, India and Iran. The agreement on the development of the Chabahar Port will open up a major new corridor for regional trade. Those developments come on the back of the earlier launch of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline project. Projects of such scale take time to deliver, but have real potential to transform Afghanistan into the regional hub it aspires to be. They show what can be achieved through regional partnerships.

On the security front, there has been a deliberate response by the security forces to the lessons learned

from the dynamics and developments of last year. The battlefield in many areas is in a state of flux, with gains and reversals but with neither side effecting clear dominance. The security forces continue to face serious challenges, including in addressing questions of morale, leadership, attrition and logistics. For now, though, they are holding their ground.

I am pleased to note that the nominees for the positions of Minister of Defence and head of the National Directorate of Security were confirmed by the Wolesi Jirga only yesterday. That is a positive development that ends a protracted period of uncertainty, and which will hopefully have both a positive operational impact and boost morale.

Quite correctly, Afghanistan has been canvassing support for a regional counter-terrorism strategy, while recognizing that peace in Afghanistan and stability in the region demand and deserve a regional effort. I believe that the region accepts that logic and that responsibility.

However, I remain deeply concerned about the impact that the high level of violence is having on the civilian population. There has been no let-up during Ramadan, during which period there have been some reports of disturbing brutality, including attacks on worshippers. Only yesterday, an incident in Badakhshan caused the deaths of 10 civilians, among them several children. Civilian casualty levels remain high and conflict-related displacement continues. I am especially concerned about the trend of targeted attacks on civilians working in the judicial sector and on journalists.

In my view, there is a risk that the conflict could enter a new phase, which could see retaliatory acts of vengeance and an escalating spiral of violence. I remind all parties to the conflict of their obligations to protect civilians from the impact of hostilities. Perpetrators of human rights and humanitarian law violations must be held to account, both to ensure justice for victims and to effectively reduce harm to the civilian population through deterrence. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has especially had cause recently to draw attention to the inviolate status of schools and medical clinics during conflict.

Progress in the areas of the economy and security is imperative so that the Afghan people have confidence in their Government, and it is especially important at this time, as the Government seeks to secure, in Warsaw and in Brussels, a firm and longer-term of international support — the third hurdle.

Serious engagement on the part of the Government with donors to address the issues that would promote success at those meetings is acknowledged. We would strongly support the Afghan appeal that development assistance is a more effective way of dealing with migration than bearing the expense of integrating migrants in host countries. However, what is expected of Afghanistan is not proof of its considerable needs, but of its demonstrable capacity to utilize resources effectively so that aid has a real impact.

There have been real attempts to meet donor expectations, as we have seen through progress in refreshing mutual accountability indicators and in providing an Afghanistan development framework. Efforts to counter corruption are moving beyond statements of intent. The establishment by President Ghani of the high council on governance, justice and anti-corruption is a first step in that regard, as is the setting up of the anti-corruption justice centre. The appointment of a new Attorney General was another positive step. The challenge ahead will be to demonstrate results, not only on paper and in the machinery of governance but also in the everyday lives of Afghans.

While we remain hopeful that the Warsaw meeting will be successful, preparations for the Brussels conference are still a work in progress. Afghanistan needs increasingly to appreciate the range of compelling demands from other countryies competing for donor dollars. The donor community, for its part, needs to recognize that its expectations of reform should be realistic when measured against the full range of challenges facing the Afghan State.

With regard to the establishment of a viable peace process, with the failure, so far, of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group to midwife such a process, and the recent death of Taliban leader Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor, such a process seems unlikely in the short term. We believe, however, that there are elements within the Taliban movement who are questioning whether they can win militarily — at least in the short term — and wondering whether a purely military goal is desirable.

During my tenure, UNAMA has engaged intensively in the pursuit of peace, both by supporting others' initiatives and by proposing and pursuing our

own. Most recently, we teamed up with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to insist jointly to the Taliban on the need for a viable peace process and to emphasize that a peaceful resolution of the long and bitter conflict was not a second prize, but a preferable outcome. A continued refusal to accept that will earn them only outcast status.

We maintain our view that peace is not a luxury, but a necessity without which Afghanistan as we know it is not sustainable. Afghans must eventually agree the arrangements by which they can live together in peace and harmony. I am disappointed that there has not yet been any traction on peace efforts, but I remain optimistic that such a process will eventually emerge.

Finally, on the political front, slow progress in advancing electoral reforms and setting an election calendar is one indicator of the need for greater political cohesion and a need for the members of a fragmented political class to acknowledge their shared destiny. On 13 June, the Wolesi Jirga voted against the draft structure law, thereby necessitating further review and discussions. The date of 17 June — the last date for announcing, pursuant to Constitutional requirements, the electoral calendar for the promised elections on 15 October — has come and gone, and there still appears to be no agreement on the way forward.

Continued uncertainty about the electoral calendar will contribute to challenges to the legitimacy of both the National Unity Government and the Parliament, which has long overstayed its term of office. An increasingly vocal opposition, drawing on the dissatisfaction prompted by the economic and security downturn but otherwise divided in its aspirations, appears to be coalescing around a common demand for a new Government arrangement.

A political confrontation is the last thing Afghanistan needs as it endeavours to cope with its current challenges, particularly in the period immediately preceding the Brussels conference, when Government effectiveness will surely fall under the spotlight. I, together with my international colleagues, have urged all political leaders to adopt a broader, more collaborative approach, rather than allowing the current fragmentation and division to stand. That applies to the cohabitation between the legislature and the executive, among the elements within the National Unity Government, and with the political opposition outside of it.

Looking forward with the insights I have gained over the past four years, I remain optimistic that Afghans can meet the challenges that they face. For that I rely on an appreciation of two qualities. The first is the resilience of the Afghan people in facing down their difficult challenges. The second is the existence of a real pan-Afghan patriotism, which survives in the face of sectarian loyalties. That is a quality that, from my experience in other war-afflicted countries, should not be undervalued. Because it is endowed with those two qualities, it is possible for Afghanistan not only to prevail to survive in 2016 but also to grow stronger as a result.

As this is my last briefing to the Security Council in my capacity as Special Representative for Afghanistan, I would like to thank my colleagues for their dedication to the work and values of the United Nations. A mission functions on the enthusiasm, professionalism and commitment of its staff, and in UNAMA I was extremely well served.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Haysom for his briefing. We would once again extend our warm thanks to him for all that he has done, as well as our very warm wishes for success in his future endeavours.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate the President for the very able way he has been leading the work of the Security Council this month.

(*spoke in English*)

I express my gratitude to the Secretary-General for his recent report (S/2016/532) on the situation in my country. I would also like to thank my friend Mr. Nicholas Haysom for his last briefing as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan. I pay tribute to his contribution to the life of our country during the crucial years of transition. I would also like to welcome another good friend Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto as the incoming Special Representative of the Secretary-General, with whom I have had the pleasure of working in Kabul.

I also wish to convey my deepest condolences in connection with the tragic atrocity that occurred in Orlando last week and yesterday's attacks in Kabul and Badakhshan. Our thoughts and prayers are with the

victims and their families. We welcome the statements of condemnation that the Security Council issued following each of those attacks.

I am pleased to report that the country has shown greater resilience in countering the ongoing challenges since the Council's deliberations on Afghanistan in March (see S/PV.7645). As I speak here today, we have just left behind us the spring season with high casualties and setbacks for the Taliban and other terrorist groups. Actors from Afghanistan's region, along with international partners, are coming together to give a more collective response to the violent extremism and terrorism emanating from the region. A number of multinational development projects have either been launched or come to fruition, creating new hope for peaceful coexistence, connectivity and prosperity in the region.

Afghanistan and its regional and international partners appear more determined than ever to prevent the continuation of violence from taking development hostage. The re-emergence of Afghanistan as a symbol of international cooperation and partnership is gaining momentum. Nevertheless, the increased civilian casualties and internal displacement and the ramifications of the cowardly behaviour of the Taliban and their supporters to compensate for their losses have been alarming.

Last winter, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) — made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States — finalized a road map for the peace process. New opportunities were presented to those willing to engage in talks. The QCG members agreed to take all the necessary measures against those who refused to engage in a political resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan.

The expectation was that the Taliban would use that opportunity and join the process. Sadly, on 12 April, they responded with their so-called spring offensive, launched simultaneously across 42 different locations in our country and causing heavy civilian suffering and proving once again that they cannot be reconciled to peaceful political initiatives. Given the brilliant performance of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, the Taliban suffered heavy losses during the first stage of the Taliban onslaught. To avenge their losses, the Taliban plotted, and claimed responsibility for, the deadly Kabul terrorist attack on 19 April, killing and wounding 411 persons, mostly civilians.

On 25 April, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai addressed a joint meeting of the National Assembly of Afghanistan. He called on Pakistan to respect the QCG agreements and take action against terrorists who, according to the credible intelligence from our own agencies as well as from our international partners and from publicly recorded confessions by Pakistani authorities themselves, have their bases and leaders in that neighbouring country. President Ahmadzai said that if Pakistan refused to carry out military operations on its soil against the terrorists, then it should surrender them to our courts to face justice. We believe that there is a need for political will and honest police action, rather than nuclear deals or F-16s, to fulfil that task. President Ahmadzai added that, despite our desire and efforts to advance regional cooperation, we would have no choice but to refer the case to the Security Council and take serious diplomatic measures, unless there was a change in the policy of using terrorist proxies against Afghanistan.

In contrast to the unforthcoming attitude of a certain neighbouring country, other QCG members have remained committed to giving — or have even already given — effect to their words. On 22 May, Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour was tracked and killed by a United States airstrike in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. The incident also exposed his Pakistani passport with a fake name, which he had used to fly from Pakistani airports numerous times. Despite that, the charade of plausible deniability, duplicity and blaming Afghan weaknesses continue. That must come to an end if we are to succeed in countering terrorism.

In the past 15 years, numerous leading terrorist figures, including the Al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and Taliban leaders Mullah Omar and Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, have lived and died in Pakistan. The fact that notorious terrorist leaders were found and killed in their safe havens there is clear proof that the country has violated the sovereignty of other nations. That constitutes a flagrant violation of the resolutions 1373 (2001) and 2255 (2015), on the sanctions regime against the Taliban. We believe that there is an urgent need for proper implementation of the existing counter-terrorism resolutions of the Security Council.

Following the failure of their so-called spring offensive, the Taliban have resorted to stepping up

highway banditry and the killing or kidnapping civilians. In late May, they kidnapped 130 civilian bus passengers in Kunduz; the fate of some of them is still unknown. Earlier today, the Taliban again took multiple travellers hostage in the province of Helmand. Meanwhile, our neighbour's provocative actions along the de facto separation line, including the illegal construction of military installations, abuse of our nationals and restrictions on trade and transit, have escalated. In the past three months, the violation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity continued with the firing of over 820 foreign artillery shells on our eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Khost, Paktika, Kunar and Nouristan, causing civilian casualties and material losses.

Most recently — in contravention of bilaterally agreed consultation mechanisms — our neighbour attempted to build new infrastructure at the Torkham Pass, thereby provoking an unnecessary military clash that produced casualties on both sides. The situation, which is a threat to international peace and security, remains tense, with a devastating impact on trade and transit. As a responsible Member of the United Nations, and under Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations, Afghanistan has submitted 19 protest notes to Pakistan and summoned that country's head of mission in Kabul three times in the past three months.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's Government and Parliament have called for a diplomatic solution to the illegal construction at Torkham Pass. An Afghan delegation was sent to Islamabad to explore a diplomatic breakthrough. We hope the voice of reason will prevail, but our message is very clear: make no mistake — I repeat, make no mistake — the proud Government and the people of Afghanistan have not, do not and will not surrender to intimidation, violence and aggression. Our history is a testimony to that.

Apart from the Taliban, constantly morphing global and regional terrorist groups seek to turn Afghanistan into a launching pad against Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia and the Far East. It is imperative that we remain vigilant and proactive against them. Despite the recent heavy blows inflicted by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces on the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaieda, those groups continue to position themselves to re-emerge in Afghanistan. Al-Qaieda has gone dark and deep. Other regional terrorist networks with links to Central Asian republics, Chechnya and China are highly active in our region.

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, in coordination with other terror groups, remains a long-term threat to the security and stability of our region. More important, most of those terrorist groups and networks enjoy the facilitation and orchestration services of elements within the Pakistani State structure who believe in the use of violence to pursue political objectives. Any country contemplating the use of good and bad terrorists against each other and against others is playing with fire and will catch fire itself. It is imperative that the international community undertake an initiative to establish objective criteria to identify and confront State sponsorship of terrorism in our neighbourhood.

Despite the challenges, Afghanistan remains committed to the peace process with reconcilable Afghan elements, parallel to strengthening its defence and security capabilities. However, it is important that we remain vigilant against the instrumentalization and misuse of the peace process by supporters of the Taliban to buy time and refuel their war machine. One can talk about peace only with those who value genuine and results-oriented negotiations. But the world has yet to see sincerity on the part of the Taliban and their supporters.

I must pay particular tribute to the brave men and women of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. I am pleased to report that the security forces, despite suffering high casualty rates, continues to move from strength to strength, proving an invaluable asset and partner in the global struggle against terrorism. We are grateful for the continuous partnership of the international community. We welcome last week's announcement by the United States on further ground and air support to the security forces. We look forward to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Warsaw Summit in two weeks' time, which will review international support for the Afghan security forces and reiterate the pledges of our international partners.

Afghanistan has moved to complete or achieve progress on a number of major national and regional projects on energy and trade. Recently, we signed an agreement with a Turkish company to explore expanding the Kajaki dam in Helmand. Afghanistan and India inaugurated the Saima irrigation and power dam in Herat. Another historic occasion was the signing of a transit trade agreement among Afghanistan, India,

and Iran on the Chabahar Port. We already started to export agricultural products through that new trade route. The leaders of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan launched the construction of the CASA 1000 project. Afghanistan is determined to continue its outreach to all regional partners for mutual growth and prosperity, but at the same time remains steadfast in refusing to allow obstructive policies in the neighbourhood to dictate its direction.

We are currently working on the development strategy framework, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to be presented at the Brussels conference on Afghanistan in October. We look forward to generous investments from the international community in support of the implementation of that strategy. We are committed to the full implementation of the September 2014 agreement on the formation of the National Unity Government. We are working with all stakeholders to identify and remove obstacles and expedite the electoral reform and convocation of the Loya Jirga on amending the Constitution.

As we approach the Brussels conference, I am pleased to report that over 90 per cent of Afghanistan's 2015-2016 commitments in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework are either complete or nearing completion. Afghanistan has established the High Council on Governance, Justice and Anti-Corruption, which oversees the national anti-corruption strategy, and has implemented anti-corruption measures in the justice sector, which are bound to improve governance. The Parliament has given votes of confidence to the new Ministers of Interior and Defence, the Attorney General and the Head of the National Directorate of Security.

Despite rising civilian casualties due to attacks by extremist factions, the determination of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to protect civilian lives remains steadfast. The Government has reiterated its commitment to promoting human rights, continues to work on revising the penal code and professionalizing the Afghan National Police, and has submitted its first periodic report to the United Nations Committee against Torture. Children's protection units are operational in different regions of the country to prevent the recruitment of children into the armed forces. Multiple women's protection and family guidance centres for survivors of domestic violence are open and functional, which shows the Government's continued support to rehabilitating victims of violence.

The humanitarian situation remains fragile, with an increase in conflict-related displacements in extreme weather conditions. Earlier this year, I was very pleased to sign the Paris Climate Agreement on behalf of my Government, which I believe puts us on the right track to make progress towards environmental and social integrity. Afghanistan is ranked among the most vulnerable countries facing the adverse impact of climate change, which affects our economic situation as well.

The ongoing flight of Afghans and the significant numbers of internally displaced remain a cause for concern, especially against the backdrop of the decrease in voluntary repatriations. Terrorist attacks on various aid organizations have hampered humanitarian assistance in several cases, and rendered refugee resettlement programmes more precarious. However, our Government is fully committed to finding sustainable solutions for the repatriation of Afghan refugees, with the support of the international community. I welcome the deliberations at the World Humanitarian Summit, and assure the Council that Afghanistan will work with our international partners to address this serious humanitarian situation.

According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's socioeconomic analysis in its *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015*, the estimated gross value of opiates in Afghanistan decreased from 13 per cent of the country's gross domestic product in 2014 to 7 per cent in 2015. This demonstrates our commitment to curbing the menace of narcotics, and we will continue to work with the international community to garner support for the Afghan national drug action plan to counter the threat of illicit drugs.

Let me conclude by saying that 2015, the first post-transition year, was a year of survival for Afghanistan, but 2016 has inaugurated the era of consolidation of the gains that we have collectively made in the past 15 years. Together, we will pave the way for the long-term sustainability of progress in our country. I thank the entire Council and almost all other United Nations Member States that have been part of our journey so far, either through sweat and toil or in spirit.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by expressing our indignation over and strong condemnation of the

terrible attacks yesterday in Kabul and Badakhshan. Most of the victims were defenceless civilians going about their daily lives; many of them were children. No goal, political, religious or otherwise, can justify actions of this nature.

This morning, the Security Council issued a press release vigorously condemning these acts, which reiterates in no uncertain terms that any form of terrorism is a criminal act that is absolutely inexcusable, whatever the motivation invoked by its perpetrators. The release further notes that those responsible for these acts will sooner or later be held accountable. There is no doubt that the international community and the Security Council steadfastly support the process towards peace, democracy and stability that the Afghan people themselves have decided to embrace and spearhead. I would ask Ambassador Saikal to convey to the Government of Afghanistan our condolences and heartfelt solidarity with the Afghan people.

I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nicholas Haysom. His presence among us will be the last in his current capacity. We therefore take this opportunity to express our gratitude for his years of steadfast commitment and tireless dedication to Afghanistan and to the Council as Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for four years, if we count his two years as Deputy Special Representative. It is been a true pleasure for my delegation to work closely with him and his team as penholder of the Security Council for Afghanistan. We have always had the highest regard for his commitment to progress and reconciliation in Afghanistan, and we wish him every success in his future endeavours. Henceforth, his successor, Ambassador Yamamoto, can count on the support and collaboration of Spain.

It is abundantly clear after reading the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/532) and hearing Mr. Haysom's briefing that Afghanistan's challenges persist and that it is at a turning point in its recent history. It behooves us to recognize the progress made, in particular since the National Unity Government has taken up functions. It has rolled out a robust reform agenda for the country's socioeconomic development.

We hail the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework, which seeks to establish a road map for reaching the self-reliance goals set forth in London in 2014, and will be presented in the upcoming ministerial conference to be held in October in Brussels. The decisive push in the fight against corruption under the direct leadership of President Ghani is also evident. We welcome the measures contemplating judicial reform, the regulation of procurement of public goods and services, and the establishment of a high council on governance, the rule of law and anti-corruption in an effort to institutionalize anticorruption policies. We commend the Government's decision to give priority attention to these matters.

In the context of human rights, the second annual dialogue on this topic between the European Union and Afghanistan, held just days ago in Kabul, brought to light the measures that have been adopted in this area, in compliance with Afghanistan's commitments, such as legal reform in the field of children's rights, criminal aspects of the law for the elimination of violence against women, and new commitments undertaken by Afghanistan with regard to various human rights instruments. We must now be equally diligent in ensuring the implementation of all of these important measures throughout the nation.

The events of the past few months make it clear that the challenges facing Afghanistan have not abated. We are alarmed by the deterioration of security, the increase of armed conflicts and the violence of insurgent and terrorist groups in the recently launched spring campaign, and the persistently high number of civilian casualties from this conflict. Yesterday's events were yet another manifestation of this reality.

We are also concerned over the deterioration of Afghan economic prospects, which may continue to decline if national security collapses further. The perceived lack of prospects among civilians is evidenced in the massive outflow of Afghan civilians towards other countries in search of opportunities which is a worrying consequence of these factors. We are also concerned about the lack of progress towards a process of peace and reconciliation, despite the undeniable efforts over the past few months of the members of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, whom I thank once again.

The lack of progress in electoral reform, despite the steps taken towards that goal, hampers compliance with the electoral timetable and could have an adverse impact on the stability and functions of the State, which at this time is the principle goal of all the institutions and political actors of Afghanistan. We are

also concerned about the ongoing rise in the number of internally displaced persons and the conditions in which they find themselves.

To summarize, it is essential to ensure that the progress that has been achieved over the past 15 years is not lost. Today perhaps more than ever in the past, it is therefore particularly important to maintain the unanimous support of the international community for the current and future efforts of the Afghan Government to promote political stability, economic growth, and the well-being and rights of all Afghan men and women, as well as their fight against terrorism and insurgency and in favour of national reconciliation.

The NATO Summit that will take place in Warsaw a few days from now and the ministerial conference scheduled for October in Brussels, to which I referred earlier, will be particularly important opportunities to demonstrate our support for Afghanistan. In the context of the international community's support and help for Afghanistan, a particularly important role must be played by regional stakeholders. Afghanistan therefore must continue to coordinate and cooperate constructively with its neighbours.

Before concluding, I would like to refer to two particular issues that are of key priority for Spain. First, I welcome the recently adopted measures pertaining to Afghanistan's national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) . I am pleased to inform the Council that Spain, together with the United Kingdom, which is the penholder for that resolution, has proposed the inclusion of Afghanistan and UNAMA in the work of the informal experts group on women, peace and security created by resolution 2242 (2015). We have done so because we are convinced that a better understanding of all that Afghanistan and UNAMA have done in that field will be very useful to the increasingly important work of the Security Council in that area.

Secondly, while I recognize the progress made and political resolve demonstrated by the Afghan authorities in a significant number of human rights-related areas, I add the voice of Spain to those who have appealed to the Government of Afghanistan to establish a moratorium on the application of the death penalty and to advance towards the necessary legal reforms necessary to commute such sentences.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): Let me first express my gratitude to you, Mr. President, for convening this debate. My gratitude also goes to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his last but, as usual, comprehensive briefing today. Japan appreciates Mr. Haysom's tireless efforts during the past two years as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and commends his achievements.

Today, I will start with a cultural aspect. Until two days ago, a special exhibition, entitled "Hidden Treasures from the National Museum in Kabul", was on display in Tokyo. There on display were 231 ancient art works from Afghanistan, enjoyed by more than 200,000 museum visitors in Fukuoka and Tokyo. In front of the National Museum in Kabul, there is a small board with a message: "Our nation stays alive when its culture stays alive". I heard that many visitors to the special exhibition in Tokyo were impressed by that message, thinking about the long history of Afghanistan and hoping for peace and stability in that country. The preservation of the Afghan cultural heritage has been one of the main areas of Japan's assistance to Afghanistan. Since 2003, Japan has been undertaking a project entitled "Safeguarding of the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley", through the UNESCO/Japanese Funds-in-Trust Trust for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage.

Afghanistan is rich, not only in culture, but also in agricultural and mineral resources. However, they are not fully accessed or utilized due to such obstacles as security concerns and underdeveloped infrastructure. It is very regrettable that civilian casualties in the first quarter of 2016 were the highest on record since 2009. Our assistance programmes on the ground cannot be implemented in their full scale because of Afghanistan's fragile security situation. Japan understands that Afghanistan is under the threat of violent extremism. At the same time, it is crucial for Afghanistan to realize economic and social self-reliance and sustainable growth so that it can overcome the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism. All the commitments made by the Government of Afghanistan must be translated into action.

In March, at the debate on UNAMA, Mr. Haysom said, "For 2016, survival will be an achievement for the National Unity Government" (*S/PV.7645, p. 2*). Indeed, 2016 is crucial for Afghanistan and the international community. Japan intends to contribute to achieving successful outcomes at the Brussels

conference in October, which will be an important milestone for the development of Afghanistan. The Afghan Government and the donors have been working towards consolidating the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework to help ensure the success of the Brussels conference. Among the priorities listed in the Framework, we highly value agriculture, energy and improving economic connectivity. With a view to ensuring the transparency and accountability of assistance, it is our hope that the opinions of the donors will be taken into account in the Framework.

Afghanistan has thrived at the crossroads of civilizations since ancient times. Now we place Afghanistan at the heart of Asia, which invites regional cooperation for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Japan is determined, together with the international community, to continue supporting the Afghan Government's endeavour for peace and prosperity and to contribute to promoting economic cooperation and integration in the region.

In conclusion, I once again express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Haysom for his efforts in extremely difficult circumstances. In particular, Mr. Haysom successfully established a communication channel with the National Unity Government and has strongly supported its reform endeavours in such areas as humanitarian assistance, electoral reform, coordination of development assistance and anti-corruption. I wish Mr. Haysom all the best in his future career, and Japan intends to continue supporting UNAMA's activities under the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General as well.

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to extend our deepest gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his detailed and useful briefing and his unrelenting efforts during his mandate as Head of UNAMA.

The Middle East and Central Asia share the same interest in and need for stability. Therefore, Egypt has always supported the Government of Afghanistan in its war against terrorism and in its tireless efforts to assert its control and sovereignty on all its territories. We also support the authorities of Afghanistan in their social and political efforts to ensure security and promote development and prosperity for all Afghanis.

We stress that drug trafficking threatens the security and stability of Afghanistan, as well as of Central Asia. In this regard, we highlight the importance and need for close coordination at the international and regional levels with the Afghani authorities to fight drug trafficking. This is part and parcel of the efforts to fight terrorism because drugs are one of the main financing sources for terrorist groups and armed militias. In this regard, we commend the efforts of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and relevant regional organizations, which have helped Afghanistan address this problem which undermines efforts to promote development and peace in the region.

In line with the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/532); General Assembly resolution 70/77, entitled "The situation in Afghanistan", adopted in December 2015; and Security Council resolution resolution 2274 (2016), which was adopted in March, it is clear that the international community has sounded the alarm against the ever-growing presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province. Indeed, that terrorist organization has managed to maintain its stronghold over the east of the country. It is a cancerous tumour that must be treated, fought and eliminated wherever it is, in line with the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

In the same regard, we stress our ongoing readiness to train army and police officers through high-level specialized sessions because Egypt's sole interest is to ensure security and stability in Afghanistan by helping the Afghan National Army in its war against terrorist organizations. We therefore hope to promote the tripartite cooperation programme in this vital field so that donors are able to provide the necessary funding to cover the costs of these very important specialized training sessions.

Egypt is promoting its constructive role as a supporting country of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul process. At the international level, we note the need to address the issue of Afghanistan effectively and extensively in all relevant forums, especially at the ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held on 4 and 5 October in Brussels.

In conclusion, Egypt continues to closely follow the political and security situation in Afghanistan because it believes it share a common goal: to support the capacity of Afghanistan, which has suffered for many decades,

to overcome these difficult challenges and achieve peace, stability, security and sustainable development.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity you have provided us by convening this meeting to once again examine the situation in Afghanistan. At the outset, allow me to thank Mr. Nicholas Haysom for the report (S/2016/532) he has just introduced to us and to commend his extraordinary work as Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Recent developments in Afghanistan show the persistence of the political, security and humanitarian problems, as well as others, which this country continues to experience and which represent a serious source of concern. Indeed, the situation in the country unfortunately continues to be marked by increased armed clashes and drug trafficking, a weakened economy and political divisions, not to mention the worsening of the humanitarian situation, which all make the stabilization and national reconciliation process difficult.

It must therefore be said that, despite the important meetings that have been held within the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process and the significant progress made towards an agreement with Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin, efforts continue to fall short owing to the demands of the Taliban for the withdrawal of international forces, the recurring attacks during the spring offensive and the reprisals following the execution of the members of that group. The situation is worsened internally by the political divisions, which I just mentioned, and regionally by the recent tensions on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which led to deadly armed clashes.

Despite this difficult security environment, UNAMA — and I pay tribute to its efforts once again — has fortunately done everything possible to support the peace and reconciliation process of the Afghan people. With regard to the international technical and financial partners and other donors that continue to invest in the stability of the country and the security of its people, we encourage them to continue their efforts to support Afghanistan's reconstruction and development, but also to continue to lend their support to the Government's efforts to restore peace and security.

In this regard, we welcome the valuable support provided by the international community and various other partners active in that country. We strongly urge all other partners who have not yet done so to do the same, because technical assistance and expertise continue to be necessary to ensure the capacity-building of the Afghan army to allow it to assume responsibility for the country's security by preventing the advances of the Taliban and curbing the spread of the Islamic State.

We must also point out and welcome the substantial progress that has been achieved thanks to regional cooperation, in particular through the Istanbul process on regional security and cooperation for peace and stability in Afghanistan. Such progress must be encouraged, in particular in the context of combatting terrorism and especially in combatting the Islamic State, which represents a genuine threat to the region. In that spirit, my delegation would like to solemnly call upon Afghanistan and Pakistan to continue to work together to find an agreed solution to the difficult problem of regional security in general and the problem of the Taliban in particular.

The humanitarian and human rights situation, like the political and security situation, to which we have just referred, remains a source of concern. There are close to 1.2 million internally displaced persons within Afghanistan, which also has one of the largest refugee population in the world. According to recent estimates, 2.6 million Afghans are living outside their country. Added to that is the high price that continues to be paid by the civilian population, in particular women and children. My delegation would therefore like to reiterate its appeal to host countries to demonstrate greater flexibility in the manner in which they deal with Afghan asylum-seekers.

While welcoming some of the initiatives taken by the Government with regard to freedom of expression, we call on all Afghan parties to ensure that they protect the media and journalists. My delegation, while paying tribute to the courage shown by the Afghan Government, which has resolutely undertaken to combat corruption, calls upon the international community, and in particular the United Nations and other partners with expertise in this area, to provide the necessary support to the Afghan authorities to help them to eradicate this scourge, which continues to pose a serious threat to the security, stability and economy of the country.

In closing, I should like to express once again my delegation's full support to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and recall the fact that the combination of regional and international efforts, in support of all of the efforts being made by the Afghan parties, remains vital in order to enable the country to overcome, on a lasting basis, the political, security and economic challenges that it has been facing for so many decades.

For that reason, my delegation hopes that at the upcoming Brussels conference it will be possible to make progress towards economic reconstruction and stabilization in Afghanistan. We hope also that solutions will be found very soon, particularly in terms of a consensus with regard to the presence of the Resolute Support Mission, and that lasting solutions will also be arrived at with respect to the financing of Afghan forces that would make it possible to resolve issues related to the peace process and the combat against terrorism.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I wish at the outset to thank Special Representative Haysom for his briefing.

Afghanistan continues to demonstrate resilience in confronting significant security, governance and economic challenges. We recognize and welcome the gains made in Afghanistan over the past 15 years, and we all share an interest in preserving and building on these gains. We see three key themes as necessary for the continued development of Afghanistan: security, reconciliation and reform.

First, with respect to security, the conflict continues to exact a significant toll on the civilian population with record high numbers this year, with almost a third of the victims being children. In April, the United Nations reported nearly 2,000 casualties in the first three months of the year, a 2 per cent increase compared with the number of civilian casualties in 2015. Just yesterday we saw attacks by the Taliban and anti-Government forces continuing to take place in civilian-populated areas. We also remain deeply concerned by the terrorist activities of the Haqqani network, Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Afghanistan, as well as the threat that improvised explosive devices continue to pose to the civilian population.

In that regard, we commend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for facilitating a high-level dialogue on civilian protection this past May that brought together representatives of the Afghan Government, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. All participants reaffirmed their commitment to the prevention and mitigation of civilian casualties, and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and the National Directorate of Security, to strengthen the accountability and transparency of Afghan security institutions.

We also recognize that the Afghan forces are fighting courageously to defend threatened populations, especially in Helmand and in parts of Baghlan and Kunduz. There is no question that Afghan forces have become more capable and professional. They have demonstrated the commitment to staying and fighting and, when control over territory is lost, to working tenaciously to regain it.

The United States remains committed to assisting Afghanistan and the Resolute Support Mission. We will maintain 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of this year and 5,500 thereafter, located at a small number of bases, including at Baghlan, Jalalabad in the east, and Kandahar in the south. We will also continue to provide financial support for the Afghan forces. We encourage all other donors to the Afghan security forces to do the same.

Afghanistan has requested donors to renew their funding for the Afghan forces at or near current levels through 2020. We urge donors to do so at, or ahead of, next month's NATO summit, in Warsaw.

Turning to reconciliation, in January Afghanistan and Pakistan, with support from the United States and China, launched the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process to synchronize cooperation for the initiation of direct talks with the Taliban. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group has met five times since its formation in January and has endorsed key principles, terms of reference and a road map, which serve as a guiding framework. The Group is committed to exploring all avenues to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. The strike against Mullah Mansoor should serve as a clear signal to the Taliban that we are prepared to take action against those who plan to potentially harm United States personnel and who continue to oppose peace. It is not,

however, indicative of a change in policy and does not foreshadow a new military initiative.

The United States remains committed to encouraging the peace process between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, and we view such a process as the only avenue for ending the war. There is no military solution to the conflict. The Taliban must understand that they can achieve their goals, including the withdrawal of international military forces, only through a peace process that leads to a negotiated settlement.

Now I should like to make a few points about reform. The security of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the nation's economic and political stability and progress. It is important to recognize some of the significant, though largely unheralded, progress that the Afghan Government has made. Despite the economic challenges facing Afghanistan, the Afghan Government successfully completed the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) staff-monitored programme on 13 April, meeting a series of IMF-designated benchmarks of progress towards improving Government revenues, strengthening the banking system and building a track record for a future IMF financial arrangement. We welcome the current negotiations with the IMF on a modest new programme with new benchmarks.

We also note that President Ghani is taking initiatives to root out corruption. He has worked to recover Kabul Bank assets and is reopening criminal cases against those who stole this money from the Afghan people. He has removed corrupt judges and other public officials. We all recognize, however, that countering corruption is a long-term process. President Ghani, though, asked that we hold him to his commitments at the London anti-corruption summit last month. We applaud his promises to establish a High Council on governance, the rule of law and anti-corruption, and to establish an anti-corruption justice centre, among other steps.

The Afghan Government is making tangible progress on self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework indicators. Already 15 of the 39 goals under the Framework have been achieved, including the successful completion of the IMF's staff-monitored programme and the filing of asset declarations by senior officials.

As we approach the conference on Afghanistan to be held in Brussels in October, we encourage the Afghan Government to continue to deliver on its reform commitments under the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework and to make progress on electoral reform, private-sector reform and women's issues. Of course, the United States remains committed to working with UNAMA, which stands as a symbol of the world's commitment to the Afghan people. UNAMA must continue in its important efforts to help Afghanistan with governance, development and promoting respect for human rights, as well as to coordinate humanitarian assistance, donor support and counter-narcotics efforts and to support reconciliation.

Finally, let me join others in thanking Special Representative Haysom for his tireless and exemplary efforts. The United States is truly grateful for his service, and we know that UNAMA will continue its work to build on the strong foundation he has laid. We all wish him well as he takes on new challenges.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): We wish to thank Special Representative Haysom for his briefing. He reminds us of the complex set of challenges facing Afghanistan. We thank him also for his patient commitment to achieving peace in Afghanistan and wish him well in his next, no-less-difficult, assignment. We look forward to continuing the Security Council's excellent relationship with his successor.

Almost 40 years after the Saur Revolution, 20 years since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban and 15 years since the United States-led intervention that followed the 11 September attacks, sustainable peace for Afghanistan continues to appear as elusive as ever. The National Unity Government continues to face difficult political, economic and security challenges.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2016/532) identifies several areas in which modest progress has been made during the reporting period, including on financial planning and political appointments. We welcome this week's confirmation of the appointments for the positions of Minister of National Defence and of Director General of the National Directorate of Security, the last significant vacant positions to be filled in the Afghan Cabinet. We also welcome the filling of the last vacancy in the Afghan Supreme Court, and we acknowledge and welcome the continued determination and increasing professionalism of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

However, that progress is more than offset by the enormous human toll the conflict continues to exact. The past three months have witnessed an increased frequency of attacks on civilians, including the

deadliest incidents in Kabul since the Taliban rule ended 15 years ago, as well as killings of Government and judicial officials. Yesterday's separate attacks, killing another 30 people, mainly civilians, underscore the determination of the Taliban and other armed groups to maintain that bloody trajectory. It is hard to take seriously the Taliban's claim to be an alternative Government when they show such disregard for the lives of ordinary Afghans and of those who put themselves at risk in the international effort to help Afghanistan.

It is also more than disappointing to note that no progress has been made during this period in the peace and reconciliation process or in achieving the regional cooperation necessary to effectively meet the serious threats facing the region. Vital milestones for the National Unity Government are yet to be reached. Economic growth remains low, with few prospects for any improvement in the short term, and outward migration continues.

All of that might seem to represent a poor return on the vast resources that have been poured into Afghanistan's security and reconstruction over the past decade. However, it is very clear from past history that, in the absence of sustained international support, Afghanistan will risk slipping once again into chaos. Whether we like it or not, the Government and the people of Afghanistan need our continuing support.

The conferences to be held later this year in Warsaw and Brussels will provide important opportunities for the international community to assess in what is needed and what can be provided. At the same time, the international community will be expecting clear results from the Afghan Government in return. The National Unity Government and regional actors need to show that they are brave enough to take the steps needed to achieve sustainable progress in addressing the challenges they face in a wide range of closed critical areas. The National Unity Government needs to provide the coherent and effective leadership its people so desperately need. We endorse Special Representative Haysom's call for the Government to adopt a broad and collaborative approach in the ongoing political dialogue. Similarly, we call on regional leaders to set aside their differences in pursuit of their shared interests in countering terrorism and in addressing the conditions that breed instability and extremism to the detriment of the security of the entire region.

The resumption of a meaningful peace and reconciliation process remains another critical challenge. We recognize the difficulty of achieving that in the short term. But there is no getting around the fact that achieving a sustainable and peaceful Afghanistan is ultimately dependent on achieving some form of reconciliation between the Afghan State and some elements of the armed opposition. As a Council, we also need to consider what practical steps we can take in supporting the peace and reconciliation process.

New Zealand continues to believe that the sanctions regime established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) can play an important role in that regard and that sanctions can, and should, be used more actively to support progress on the ground. That includes targeted measures to reduce the ability of the Taliban to seek a military solution. One example is by taking further steps to restrict access to improvised explosive devices and their components. Another is creating incentives for meaningful engagement in the peace and reconciliation process. Regular and meaningful engagement between the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2001) and key stakeholders is important to ensure that the sanctions regime complements broader efforts. We remain committed to do our part in that regard during our remaining time as Chair of the Committee.

One immediate action the 1988 Sanctions Committee can take is to ensure its listings remain up-to-date, particularly to keep pace with changes in the Taliban leadership. In that regard, we note that regard both the new Taliban leader and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan leader are not currently listed. That anomaly must be addressed as soon as possible.

We all stand to benefit from achieving a stable and peaceful Afghanistan, no more so than for its immediate neighbours and Afghanistan itself. New Zealand will continue to offer its support to Afghanistan and to the work of the Special Representative and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in ensuring that the political and security foundations are in place for Afghanistan to advance. We look forward to taking stock of progress in September.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I would like to to use this opportunity to add my voice to others on behalf of my Government to thank Special Representative Haysom for the way he has carried out what I think is an extraordinarily tough job, and one that he has

done with both flair and commitment. On behalf of my Government, adding what to others have said, I thank him very much indeed.

As we heard in today's briefing, Afghanistan still faces an exceptionally tough road ahead. As it works through myriad challenges, the latest civilian casualty figures from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) remind us of the ongoing human cost. Others have talked about some of the incidents that have happened recently. But looking back over time, nearly 59,000 civilians have been killed or severely injured since UNAMA records began. The vast majority were at the hands of anti-Government groups. Fifty-nine thousand is an extraordinary price to pay. It is a price being paid in Badakhshan and in Kabul, following attacks just yesterday. I offer my Government's condolences for all those who lost their lives or who were injured in those shameful attacks, including those working at the Canadian Embassy. I hope the Canadian Ambassador will convey that to his Government on our behalf.

It is clear that our job is far from done. And it is clear that the support of the Security Council and the international community remains vital to Afghanistan. Our collective action can have a direct positive impact on the lives of the Afghan people. We need to show that we are standing by Afghanistan in the months and years ahead. I see three areas where we can do so.

First, on the matter of security, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are admirably holding their own this year. They are repelling the Taliban's spring offensive and forcing back Da'esh as it tries to expand. But their task is formidable, and the longer-term stability of Afghanistan is dependent on their success. We therefore cannot just speak about our commitments to supporting Afghan security, we have to demonstrate it, too. The NATO Warsaw Summit in July will be an opportunity for States to show that resolve. The United Kingdom intends to provide $100 million each year to the Afghan national forces from 2017 to 2020. Meanwhile, 450 United Kingdom troops continue to provide military support and training as part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission. That includes helping the Afghan national army officer academy, where 1,300 officer graduates have been trained, with more female officers than ever.

In that regard, allow me to add my voice to that of Spain in saying that I am very pleased that we are including Afghanistan together on our joint work programme on women and peace and security. I call on other members of the international community to show their support, not just through their words inside the Chamber but through their actions and financial commitments outside of it.

My second point concerns development. Development and security are mutually reinforcing. Together we need not only to build an Afghanistan that is stable and resilient, but also self-reliant and prosperous. Continued development assistance will be critical to the future Afghanistan. It is therefore equally critical that we do not see a drop-off in assistance this year, particularly given the fragility of the Afghan economy. We look forward to the international community going to Brussels this year ready to make long-term financial commitment to Afghanistan. We also look forward to the Government of Afghanistan setting out the progress it has delivered so far and its priorities for the coming years, including on economic reform, job creation and tackling corruption.

My third and last point is that, if we want security and development to take hold in Afghanistan, then there needs to be political stability. That is why the United Kingdom supports the National Unity Government as it tackles Afghanistan's challenges head-on. We strongly believe that the best chance for reaching a negotiated peace starts with the stability of the National Unity Government, the effectiveness of the national forces and the support of Afghanistan's neighbours. It is therefore especially important that the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan work towards a stronger relationship. That is not only to stop the escalation of incidents like the one last week at the Torkham border crossing, but also to tackle the larger common threat of violent extremism. It is my firm view that the long-term interests of both Afghanistan and Pakistan are aligned. Their success is dependent, in part, on how much both countries recognize that.

Let me conclude with this final thought: Afghanistan still faces grave security, development and political challenges. Through the summits in Brussels and Warsaw and through the Council, we have a real chance to show the National Unity Government and the people of Afghanistan that they do not face those challenges alone. We need to keep bolstering the military, keep supporting the economy and keep building international and regional support. In doing that, we can help ensure that 2016 really does turn — to use the words of the

Ambassador of Afghanistan — from the year of survival to the year of consolidation.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We thank Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing on the quarterly report (S/2016/532) of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan. We convey our deep appreciation and gratitude for the work of Mr. Haysom and for his contribution in facing, with the Afghanistan authorities and people, the great challenges in achieving peace and a better life. We praise the work of UNAMA in discharging its mandate under extremely difficult conditions while Afghanistan struggles to establish a society based on the fundamental values of peace, human rights and social equity.

This debate offers us an opportunity to assess the political, security and human rights situation, as well as the latest regional and international developments, concerning Afghanistan. The overall situation in the country, as portrayed in the report of the Secretary-General is most worrisome. In the past three months, the Afghan Government continued to face significant political, security and economic challenges. However, despite a dire situation, as Mr. Haysom stressed, important progress was achieved in the past 10 years. The Afghans and the international community must do everything in their power to ensure the gains are irreversible. We deeply regret that the initial impulse of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process in its efforts to facilitate a peaceful solution to the conflict through dialogue between the Government and the Taliban did not bear the desired results.

As in the previous period, the security situation remained unstable, characterized by continuous and intense armed clashes in various regions of the country and terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Taliban, with a disastrous impact on the civilian population. We took note, with dismay, that over 1,900 civilian victims were documented in the period covered by the report, with 60 per cent of the deaths attributed to non-governmental elements. The indiscriminate killing of civilians deserves our most vigorous condemnation, and we urge all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations and human rights and international humanitarian law by putting an end to attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Continued and widespread armed clashes and very low economic growth generate a precarious humanitarian situation, characterized by increasing numbers of internally displaced people and a high number of Afghan migrants already in Europe. On the other hand, humanitarian access remains a matter of concern. Incidents involving humanitarian workers are on the rise, while humanitarian funding for food, nutrition, health care and refugee programmes are insufficient to meet such huge humanitarian needs.

The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have shown increasing resilience despite the pressures they face, including rising casualty and attrition rates, which create great challenges to the sustainability of the forces, as underlined in the report of the Secretary-General.

It is common wisdom that long-term stability and prosperity in Afghanistan depend upon national reconciliation, based on respect of human rights and fundamental liberties, regional and international cooperation, mutual respect and non-interference in one another's internal affairs.

Afghanistan is pursuing regional commitments with an emphasis on the economy and security. During the period under review, regional cooperation appeared to be the most virtuous development in and around Afghanistan. The agreement among Afghan President Ghani, Iranian President Rouhani and Indian Prime Minister Modi on transport, trilateral transit and facilitation of trade among the three countries and the engagement by the countries of the region with the similar Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process as a platform for regional cooperation, including the fight against terrorism, are other welcome developments, as are as the consultations held in Kabul by the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force with Government officials on plans to develop a structure for a regional strategy on combating terrorism. In that regard, we commend the efforts on the part of the Afghan authorities to develop relations with regional partners in neighbouring countries in the fight against terrorism and in pursuing a political settlement to the conflict they have been engulfed in for so long.

We take good note of the determination on the part of the Afghan authorities and institutions to adopt more rigorous policies and practices and translate them into actions aimed at building the population's trust. The agenda for the reform of the Afghan Government has

started to produce a meaningful impact on the lives of the Afghans. The fight against corruption is a key feature of the agenda. We welcome the establishment, by a presidential decree, of a High Council on governance, Justice and Anti-corruption to oversee the drafting and implementation of a national anti-corruption strategy and presidential statements outlining measures to step up the anti-corruption drive.

In conclusion, we are mindful that the challenges faced by Afghanistan are immense. We join the Secretary-General in applauding Afghanistan's commitment, along with China, Pakistan and the United States, in the context of the Quadrilateral Coordination group on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process to reach a negotiated agreement between the Government and the Taliban for the achievement of sustainable peace for the Afghan people.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, we would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in Afghanistan and for his courageous work as Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We listened closely to the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal.

For many years now, developments in the security situation in Afghanistan continue to be the subject of our extreme concern. Unfortunately, the situation is going from bad to worse. We fear that the armed opposition and terrorist groups will this year pursue their efforts to seize strategically important towns and gain control over large swathes of the country's territory. The Taliban movement, having announced the start of its spring offensive, is systematically carrying out high-profile attacks in various parts of Afghanistan, and most of them are against civilian populations. The series of terrorist attacks that took place on 20 June in various parts of the country is further evidence of this fact. I would ask Ambassador Saikal to convey our sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

We are particularly concerned about the increase in the number of members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the attempts of that group to absorb other armed opposition groups, mainly in the north of Afghanistan. It is our hope that the future leadership of UNAMA, in particular the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, will pay careful attention to this dangerous phenomenon.

We support the Government's approach to achieving national reconciliation. We are ready to support progress in the negotiations process, including being flexible on the possible softening of sanctions set up by the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), on the Taliban, if it is not contrary to Afghanistan's national interests.

We welcome the appointment of the country's leading religious figure, Mr. Gilani, to the Head of the High Peace Council. We hope that, with his participation, the national reconciliation process will be given renewed dynamism.

We take note of the Afghan Government's intention to develop a dialogue with the armed opposition. We support any efforts made in that regard, but we are convinced that national reconciliation will be lasting only when it takes on a genuinely national character.

The main challenge in terms of reconciliation means involving the Taliban movement in the peace talks, but that has not yet been achieved. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process needs to organize direct talks between the Government and the Taliban, although the important decisions that have already been taken have not, it would seem, led to any significant results. We call on the armed opposition to rise to the level of State responsibility for the fate of Afghanistan and its people, end its military activities, stop its reprisals and acts of terrorism and enter into a significant, substantive dialogue with the country's legitimate authorities.

Russia is ready to establish constructive cooperation with the Afghan leadership in order to support stability and an independent path forward for Afghanistan, so that the country can be free from terrorism and the drug threat.

We take note of the world's growing understanding of the important regional dimension of settling the conflict in Afghanistan, as well as the increased number of regional platforms that focus on Afghan issues. We believe it is important that, in the contex of such activities, regional stakeholders themselves should have a decisive role to play.

We are convinced that efforts to support Afghanistan should mainly be undertaken using the structures that have proved their worth, for example,

first of all, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), whose stakeholders, observers or partners in dialogue include practically all of the countries of the region, including Afghanistan. We welcome Afghanistan's official application to become a member of the SCO. We actively support steps by the Afghan Government, to which Ambassador Saikal referred, to establish economic cooperation and integration with regional neighbours.

We see considerable potential in enhancing counter-terrorism and anti-narcotics cooperation between Afghanistan and the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. However, in this context we must say that the new NATO Resolute Support Mission has not yet achieved its declared goals. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which is courageously fighting the terrorist threat, is suffering major losses as it counters the opposition, as well as experiencing serious difficulties in effectively pushing back the opposition's onslaught. We take note of the decision of the United States Administration to halt its withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, which reflects a recognition that the security problem has not yet been resolved.

It must not be forgotten that Russia voted in favour of resolution 2189 (2014), on launching the Resolute Support operation, based on the belief that the North Atlantic alliance would report to the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan in the context of that operation. NATO and the United States of America have a special responsibility for training the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and ensuring its effectiveness and security in Afghanistan. Another area of work is to ensure that no threat to third-party countries should come from Afghan territory. That said, the situation in this area — and I will say this directly — is alarming. An example of this is the situation in northern districts of Afghanistan, where there is a growing presence of foreign terrorist fighters and an increase in the activities of ISIL.

The drug problem poses a serious threat to the stability of Afghanistan itself, its neighbours in the region and the world at large. In addition to the direct harm it causes, drug production provides substantial and determinative financial support for terrorism. In that context, we believe it is necessary to step up efforts by the international community to fight drug trafficking from Afghan territory. We have no illusions about the 2015 statistics showing a significant drop in opium production in Afghanistan. We are concerned at forecasts of a significant increase in the poppy harvest this year.

The key to improved stability of the situation in Afghanistan is a militarily capable Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which should on its own be able to ensure peace and stability in its own country. In February, Russia provided free delivery of weapons and munitions to meet the needs of Afghanistan's security forces. We will continue to help Kabul in training members of the structures of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces through the relevant Russian services, particularly since our two countries historically enjoy a high level of cooperation and mutual assistance in these areas. We will continue that work both bilaterally and through cooperation with international partners, despite the changes in the approach of the United States, NATO and many Western countries to implementing, together with the Russian Federation, joint projects to support Afghanistan.

The task of consolidating the efforts of the main external players remains the primary precondition for resolving the main problems in Afghanistan. Competition over areas of influence should be eliminated immediately, as should involvement in domestic affairs. We need to combine our efforts to ensure that there is national reconciliation in the country, that we eliminate the problem of terrorism and that we help Afghanistan back onto the path of sustainable development. We particularly stress the fact that the situation can be resolved only through good-neighbourliness, open international and regional cooperation and cooperation with the legitimate Government of Afghanistan, while respecting that State's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open meeting on Afghanistan. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan, Mr. Haysom, for his briefing, and Ambassador Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his statement.

China strongly condemns the multiple terrorist attacks that took place in Afghanistan on 20 June. We express our profound sympathy to the families of the victims, as well as our sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

By and large, the Afghan Government of National Unity has recently been operating effectively and

making substantial efforts to develop its economy, promote reconciliation and safeguard stability. Afghanistan continues to face grim challenges in the political, economic and security fields. There is a need for unity on the part of all Afghan communities, as well as the sustained attention, support and assistance of the international community. I wish to emphasize the following four points.

First, improvement in the security situation is the basis for Afghan stability. Recently, the security situation in Afghanistan has taken a turn for the worse. Domestic armed clashes have been escalating, with increasing civilian casualties. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and other terrorist forces are seizing the opportunity to enhance their presence in Afghanistan, thus gravely jeopardizing Afghan safety and stability. The international community should enhance Afghan's self-defence and counter-terrorism capabilities by increasing its assistance to the country in the security sector so as to prevent setbacks in the security situation. We hope that the United Nations will strengthen its assessment of the security situation in Afghanistan; promote cooperation between Afghanistan and the countries of the region in the fight against terrorism, drugs and transnational crimes; and jointly create conditions conducive to improving the security situation in Afghanistan.

Secondly, promoting national reconciliation is a fundamental way of achieving a solution on the question of Afghanistan. China welcomes the recent peace agreement between the Afghan Government and Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan. We hope that it will serve as an example for the Afghan national reconciliation process. The international community should continue to exercise a positive influence on the parties concerned and fully support an inclusive reconciliation process led and owned by Afghans. The Afghan parties concerned must put the interests of the nation and the people above all else and resume peace talks as soon as possible.

Thirdly, strengthening governance is an important guarantee for Afghan development. In the final analysis, Afghan affairs must be managed by the Afghan people themselves. In the light of Afghanistan's development strategy and its concrete needs, the international community should provide more targeted assistance to the Afghan Government in terms of resources for governing the country and consolidate the results of its nation-building efforts. With national stability and prosperous development in mind, all Afghan communities should strengthen their unity and commit to resolving their differences through dialogue and consultations.

Fourthly, the promotion of economic and social development is a necessary condition for Afghan prosperity and stability. The international community must increase its assistance to Afghanistan; support the Afghan Government's efforts to halt its economic downturn, promote comprehensive economic and social development in Afghanistan, encourage and support the Afghan Govenrment in its efforts to fully leverage its advantages in terms of resources and location, strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan in the areas of infrastructure, trade, investment and human-resources training and promote Afghanistan's cooperation with neighbouring countries in their mutual interest so that Afghanistan can be integrated into robust regional development.

Resolution 2274 (2016) calls on all parties to actively participate in the One Belt, One Road initiative and other initiatives in the area of economic cooperation. We hope that all parties will comply with the resolution and actively participate in building regional connectivity, communication and economic cooperation. China and Afghanistan are friendly neighbours. China hopes that Afghanistan will achieve peace, security, stability and development as soon as possible. Recently, Mr. Abdullah, Afghanistan's Chief Executive Officer, visited China. China and Afghanistan jointly signed multiple important documents regarding cooperation in economy, technology, connectivity, communication and other areas.

China firmly supports Afghanistan's counter-terrorism efforts and will continue to provide Afghanistan with assistance to strengthen its security capabilities.

China firmly supports the Afghan peace and reconciliation process and stands ready to continue to play an active role in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group mechanism in order to help promote Afghan reconciliation.

China firmly supports Afghanistan's integration into regional cooperation efforts. We will align the One Belt, One Road initiative with Afghanistan's national transition and development strategy and continue to contribute to Afghans' early attainment of sustainable peace and development.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): First, I wish to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Haysom for his extensive briefing, and Ambassador Seikal for his statement. We value Special Representative Haysom's insights on the enormous security, political and economic challenges faced by Afghanistan and his persistent and untiring efforts to work with Afghan partners for peace.

We are supportive of the Afghan Government's unwavering commitment and ongoing efforts to achieve national unity and lasting stability, as rightly underscored by Ambassador Seikal. However, although we commend the best efforts of the Government and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, it is troubling that the Taliban appear to be gaining ground and sowing fear among the vulnerable and long-suffering population. Yesterday's horrific string of attacks, for which the Taliban has claimed responsibility, provides an example of their continued barbarism. As such, we are pleased that the Council swiftly agreed to condemn the attacks and express solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan as well as with the peoples and the Governments of Nepal and India. We remain convinced that the Taliban and other violent extremist and terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan must continue to be dealt with in a comprehensive manner. In that context, ongoing efforts to win hearts and minds of the Afghan population must be stepped up in order to deny the Taliban their support base.

Like many others that want to see a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan, Malaysia places much hope in the ability of the recently established Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process to successfully convene direct peace talks between the Government and the Taliban. Unfortunately, given the continuing Taliban intransigence, such hopes remain unachievable. The recent killing of the principal Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour, according to some analysts, would appear to have complicated the Group's efforts in that regard. Against such a development, no reiteration is required that meaningful progress towards sustainable peace and stability can be achieved only through a peaceful political settlement among the parties. Let us hope that the members of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group will continue to explore and pursue all avenues in facilitating early direct talks between the Government and the Taliban. In that respect, Malaysia is pleased to note the Afghan Government's steadfast commitment to implementing the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. The Afghan Government's robust engagement and cooperation with regional partners and the international community, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, is encouraging.

The NATO Warsaw Summit 2016 next month and the upcoming Brussels conference in October, in our view, present opportunities for partners to complement and assist the Afghan Government's reconstruction and development efforts. At the regional level, cooperation in addressing security issues and countering the threat of terrorism and extremism has thus far been encouraging. Pursuing further collective efforts involving the Afghan Government, regional partners and the United Nations in developing a framework for a regional counter-terrorism strategy within the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is imperative. My delegation further notes that the Secretary-General's report on Afghanistan (S/2016/532) highlights, among other issues, the increasing number of civilian casualties, mainly attributable to anti-Government forces or elements. It is therefore not surprising that children continue to suffer disproportionately from the ongoing conflict, accounting for almost one-third of all civilian casualties.

On a positive note, Malaysia is encouraged by the strong progress in ending recruitment of children by the Afghan National Police. Malaysia strongly encourages full implementation of the Action Plan and Road Map towards Compliance, particularly by the Afghan local police. However, the plight of the children is not over, as non-State armed groups and violent extremist groups continue to recruit and retain children among their ranks through manipulation or coercion, facilitated by poverty. In that connection, we call on all parties to the conflict to undertake the necessary measures to uphold the obligations to ensure the safety, security and well-being of all children in the country.

We must emphasize that the international community's support is especially vital to the success of this long-term endeavour. To that end, we call for continuing and strengthened cooperation between the Government and the United Nations, particularly with UNAMA and the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as among bilateral and other multilateral partners and stakeholders.

In conclusion, Malaysia reiterates its firm support for the reconciliation and the reintegration efforts undertaken by the Afghan Government to provide a secure future for all Afghans and to end violent extremism and terrorist groups' activities.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): I would like to join other delegations in expressing our appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Haysom, for his briefing and dedicated service as Head of the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We wish him every success in his future assignment.

While Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later today, I would like to add our voice to the sincerest condolences to the people and Government of Afghanistan, as well as those of Nepal and India, with regard to yesterday's heinous terrorist attacks in Kabul and Badakhshan.

We would like to note some important progress made by the Government of Afghanistan in stabilizing the political situation in the country since our last meeting on this subject (see S/PV.7645). The assignment of candidates to fill key Government positions in the security sector, obtaining their approval by the National Assembly, the promotion of legislative reforms on elections, and the fight against corruption and terrorism are all welcome developments.

Yet, we are concerned that the preparations for the long-awaited parliamentary and district council elections, scheduled for October, are being hampered by disagreements over the electoral process and by the ambiguity over the appointment of the leadership of electoral management bodies. If the current political impasse and security threats posed by terrorist groups are used as an excuse for postponing the polls, the prolonged delay will cause further fragmentation among political elites in Afghanistan and overshadow the legitimacy of the legislature.

To ensure the country's economic growth, in our view the Government should focus attention on addressing the fiscal gap, poverty and unemployment, as stipulated in the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. Cooperation with relevant international financial and trade organizations should also be carried out in order to further the implementation of the Government's economic reform agenda.

We regret that the efforts of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group have not resulted in real prospects for moving forward a national reconciliation process and organizing direct peace talks between the Taliban factions and Afghan Government representatives. To an even greater extent, the ongoing insurgency campaign of various terrorist and violent extremist groups continues to adversely affect Afghanistan's political, economic and security stability.

The annual Taliban spring offensive, followed by a range of deadly terrorist attacks, have shocked the world with the number of fatalities. In that regard, we praise the courage of the Afghan nation in withstanding that terrorist threat and preventing the insurgency from widening its geographical reach. We call on the United Nations and the whole international community to continue to support Afghanistan in those endeavours, including by strengthening its counter-terrorism capacities.

We also welcome the efforts of Afghanistan's international partners to combat the Taliban, in particular the elimination on 21 May this year of its leader, Mullah Akhtar Mansour. However, the swift election of Mansour's successor, Haibatullah Akhundzada, and his deputies, who have strong connections with Al-Qaida through the Haqqani network, have demonstrated the resilience of the Taliban threat. Some experts heralded a decline in hostilities while the new Taliban leadership seeks pledges of allegiance with field commanders, yet there is a danger of an intensification of the insurgency as those commanders try to expand their influence and support base in order to bargain with Akhundzada for privileges. It is also alarming that the new Taliban leader has never appeared on the relevant United Nations sanctions list. Here, we agree with those who call for this omission to be corrected without any delay. Ukraine would also like to reiterate its call on members of the international community with a degree of influence on the Taliban to persuade its leadership to finally renounce aggression against the Afghan nation and earnestly participate in peace negotiations.

The protection of civilians in Afghanistan has become an increasingly complex challenge, particularly in the light of the ongoing Taliban offensive. The ever-growing numbers of casualties, especially among women and children, and the displacement rates of those forced to abandon their homes and seek refuge, warrant our close attention. Another part of that problem is the protection of humanitarian, medical and health-care

facilities in situations of armed conflict. Last month, the Security Council sent a strong message concerning this pressing issue by adopting resolution 2286 (2016).

However, as pointed out in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/532), health and humanitarian institutions of the United Nations, international and non-governmental organizations, including those carrying out demining activities, continue to be subjected to arbitrary searches, threats, looting and abductions by all parties to the conflict. That constitutes a blatant violation of international humanitarian law.

We are deeply concerned by these facts and call on all sides to follow both the legal and fundamental moral obligations to protect civilians in armed conflict and to ensure their unimpeded access to humanitarian aid. We also call on the Government of Afghanistan to systematically investigate, with the support of UNAMA, all such violations and bring those responsible to justice.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to begin by condemning the recent terrorist attacks that occurred on 20 June in Kabul and Badakhshan, which caused loss of life and injuries. We extend our solidarity to the people and the Government of Afghanistan and we convey our condolences to the families of the victims of such a terrible terrorist attack.

We would like to thank Mr. Nicholas Hayson, Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his commendable efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan in his capacity as Special Representative of the Secretary-General. As this is his last briefing to the Security Council in his capacity as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNAMA, we would like to wish him every success in his future endeavours. We would also like to express our support to Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, who will take over the leadership of UNAMA. We also express our gratitude to the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, our friend Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, for his statement.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is following with concern the sensitive political and security situation in Afghanistan, which continues to pose major challenges to that country. The dialogue process with the Taliban insurgency has been seriously impacted by the armed group's refusal to participate in the peace talks and by foreign interference. It is essential to create a favourable political environment for carrying out the agenda for change proposed by President Ashraf Ghani, with the participation of all actors in Afghan society and as an Afghan-led process free of foreign interference.

In that context, the strengthening of dialogue and mutual trust among all parties is essential to consolidate peace. It is therefore necessary to redouble efforts along those lines with the support of the international community. Of special interest are the peace agreements reached by the Afghan authorities and the Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin. The agreements are a positive sign that other opposition groups might engage in similar initiatives with the Afghan authorities, thereby paving the way for national reconciliation.

Venezuela reiterates its call on the Taliban insurgency to decisively join the peace talks. We support what was said by the Secretary-General, who noted that direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan Government are key to that process. In that regard, we appreciate the positive role that has been played by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which includes Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States, in support of the national peace and reconciliation dialogue between the Afghan Government and Taliban.

The security situation has been negatively impacted by the Taliban's continued military operations. In that regard, we note with concern the increase in the number of armed clashes in 2016, with the east and south-east regions being the most affected. According to the report (S/2016/532) of the Secretary-General, the year 2016 is showing higher rates of violence than those of June 2014.

Afghanistan has also been destabilized by the presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), whose cells, according to the report (S/2016/92) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2253 (2015), are located in southern and western Afghanistan. Over 1,000 foreign terrorist fighters are operating in the country. That is why ISIS and other terrorist groups pose a serious threat to peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region and must be fought within the framework of international cooperation.

At the political level, we recognize the recent advances in the strengthening of Afghanistan's institutions following the appointment of officials

to high-level positions in the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Defence. Similarly, we welcome the initiative and commitment of President Ghani on holding parliamentary and district elections in October, with UNAMA's assistance. In that regard, Venezuela highlights the constructive work carried out by UNAMA in coordination with the Government. The role of the Mission has been crucial to the promotion of peace, national reconciliation, regional cooperation and economic and social development. We extend our thanks to the Mission and commend the efforts it undertakes for the reconstruction of the country.

In the area of the political empowerment of women within the framework of resolution 1325 (2000), we emphasize the interaction between UNAMA and the Ministry of Women of Afghanistan to strengthen women's protection services and eradicate violence against women. The opening of 23 centres to address this issue demonstrates the Afghan Government's commitment in this area. We encourage it to continue working in that direction.

Our country hopes that dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan will be strengthened in order to contribute to stability in the region. The political clashes between the two nations must be overcome for the benefit of their peoples. The shared challenges in the political, economic and security fields call for greater understanding by the authorities of the two countries in order to overcome mistrust and the problems affecting them. We welcome the strengthening of regional cooperation among Afghanistan, India and Iran, which has been seen in the signing of the trilateral transport and transit agreement, which will facilitate trade among the three countries and the countries of Central Asia. The ongoing high-level visits to the country from its neighbours are a clear indication of this trend towards dialogue and solving problems of common interest within the region itself.

The Brussels international conference for the development of Afghanistan, to be held in October, is vital for the promotion of stability, security and economic and social development of the nation. We therefore urge the international community to continue supporting the people and the Government of Afghanistan by providing resources and capacity-building to promote its comprehensive development. It is worth noting that improving the country's security situation will have a positive impact on political, economic and social dynamics.

Drug trafficking continues to pose serious threats to peace and stability in Afghanistan, while also being a public health problem with serious consequences for the Afghan people. As indicated in the report, 7 per cent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product comes from drug trafficking. While there has been a decrease in the overall value of opium cultivation, the Taliban insurgency continues to use illegal drug trafficking to finance their terrorist activities. In that regard, we recognize the efforts undertaken by the Government in this area, which has received assistance from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. We reiterate that an effective fight against drugs requires international cooperation, including among neighbouring countries, to prevent, combat and eliminate this scourge.

The armed conflict in Afghanistan continues to impact civilians, who are the main victims of the armed clashes between the parties. According to the report, 600 people were killed and 1,373 were injured during the reporting period, which reflects a 2 per cent increase. The report submitted by UNAMA acknowledges that women and children are the most affected by the spiralling violence. In 2015, there was a 37 per cent increase in fatalities among women and a 34 per cent increase among children. Similarly, we express our concern about the detention of children on charges of associating with armed groups.

Finally, we encourage the Government of Afghanistan to continue its efforts to promote a comprehensive and inclusive political process leading to the establishment of a strong and lasting peace, to make progress in gaining control of its entire territory and resources, to strengthen the State and its institutions to the benefit of its people, who have been affected by so many years of war and violence.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, let me thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for the work he has carried out during the nearly five years of his mandate with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as the commitment with which he has carried out the difficult task that was entrusted to him.

Uruguay underscores the press statement adopted today by the Security Council condemning in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks in that took place yesterday in Afghanistan. We reiterate our solidarity with the families of the victims.

Uruguay remains concerned at the situation in Afghanistan. The country continues to face increasing difficulties in a context characterized by a deteriorating security situation, a renewed offensive by the Taliban, an upswing in internal political tensions and sluggish rates of economic growth. All of this comes despite the efforts made by the National Unity Government, the countries of the region and the international community.

Against that backdrop, we would like to reiterate once again our support for the work being carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and we call on the Mission and the National Unity Government to work more closely together, guided by the spirit of national leadership and ownership, bearing in mind the fact that there remain major challenges to the reconstruction and stabilization of the country.

On a similar note, we support the work being done by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group and the commitment of its member States to the peace process. It is our hope that this mechanism will continue to maintain its relevance through the inclusion, as soon as possible, of all actors involved in the peace talks. It is vital that efforts continue to be made to promote direct talks between the Government and the Taliban at the earliest possible time.

Likewise, Uruguay would like to express its support for the swift ratification of the peace agreement signed a month ago between the Government of Afghanistan and the Hezb-i-Islami group, which would represent a significant step towards decreasing the level of violence and instability in the country.

By the same token, we deem crucial the strengthening of Afghanistan's institutional apparatus. Similarly, it is necessary for the National Unity Government to continue to strengthen its commitment to introducing electoral reforms, which would make it possible to ensure that the elections scheduled for this year take place in a democratic and transparent manner and that the necessary guarantees are in place.

Uruguay urges the Afghan authorities to continue to adopt anti-corruption measures at the public administration level and to fill vacant Cabinet seats. Such steps would allow us to provide greater stability to a political scene that is characterized by a ramping up of the insurgency and the proliferation of the political opposition.

Uruguay is particularly concerned at the consequences of the existing instability for the civilian population, which has also had very damaging effects by preventing thousands of children from accessing health-care services and from going to school. We are concerned also at what was stated in the UNAMA communiqué of 2 June about the wave of abductions, hostage-taking incidents and summary executions of civilians that have taken place over the past few weeks.

I cannot but stress that the humanitarian situation has deteriorated as a direct result of the increase in the number of displaced persons, whose very survival is at risk as a consequence of the insecurity resulting from the conflict, against the backdrop of an operational environment that has made it increasingly difficult for the humanitarian actors that are working on the ground.

In that context, and bearing in mind that, according to the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/532), civilians have been the victims of both opposition elements and attacks carried out by Government forces, Uruguay believes that there is an imperative need for all parties to abide by their obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

On a similar note, we appeal for full compliance with the provisions of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of hospitals and humanitarian staff engaged in medical duties in situations of armed conflict, taking into account their inviolable status as well as the importance of the provision of health-care services for the civilian population.

Overcoming, over the long term, the prevailing situation of instability and insecurity in Afghanistan will depend to a large extent on the success achieved in taking firm strides towards a lasting peace. To do so, is essential that sustained support continue to be provided to the efforts undertaken by Afghanistan to alleviate the humanitarian situation, consolidate the political transition and promote economic activity and the holistic development of Afghanistan.

In conclusion, Uruguay condemns all use of violence against the civilian population and is alarmed at the activities carried out by the Taliban and groups associated with the Islamic State, which have taken the lives of innocent and defenceless civilians. Against that backdrop, we deem it crucial to step up the fight against terrorism in the region, particularly through the adoption of more robust measures targeting their

sources of funding, which are often closely linked to the high levels of illicit drug trafficking in the country.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of France.

Allow me to begin by warmly thanking Nicholas Haysom and Ambassador Saikal for being with us today and for their respective briefings. I should like in advance to align myself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union and to make three comments.

I should first like to welcome the fact that Afghanistan continues to move forward in its transition, as reflected by the continued reforms undertaken by the Government since September 2014. The recent appointments to senior Government posts and governors' posts are also to be welcomed. France reiterates its full support to the Afghan Government and encourages it to continue its efforts. I should like also to reiterate my country's commitment to cooperating with Afghanistan in the areas set out in the important Franco-Afghan Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, which has bound our two countries since 2012.

Secondly, as the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/532) points out, the circumstances remain difficult and the challenges manifold. Beyond the need to sustain political and economic reforms, the priority continues to be ending the fighting and re-establishing lasting security. The recent attacks, particularly that of yesterday and the one carried out on 19 April last in Kabul, which left 64 people dead and 327 wounded, show that the situation remains fragile. On behalf of France, I wish to express once again our deep condolences in connection with these tragic events and to pay tribute to the courage and resilience of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which, in addition to the Taliban, must also deal with the challenge caused by terrorist groups affiliated with Da'esh.

The refusal by the Taliban to respond to the offer of direct talks with the Afghan Government made by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on Afghanistan is of course a disappointment for the international community. It can only continue to pointlessly prolong the violence and the suffering of the Afghan people. Frances hopes that the dialogue can resume as soon as possible so as to put an end to the conflict and move towards national reconciliation. France also calls upon all countries of the region to actively support the stabilization of Afghanistan and to contribute positively to the establishment of lasting peace in the country. In that context, prospects for an economic opening towards Central Asia and Iran are positive.

The illicit economy, corruption and the production and trafficking of drugs must be actively combated by Afghanistan and its regional partners, because these are also major obstacles to the re-establishment of security in and the development of the country.

Thirdly, and finally, this fragile context makes the international community's support for Afghanistan even more important in order to help the country make progress towards greater stability, prosperity and democracy. The support of the United Nations in particular remains crucial, particularly in the provision to the population of basic services and international assistance.

France is particularly committed to UNAMA's good-offices role. Resolution 2274 (2016), adopted in March, allowed the international community to reassert its determination to maintain its support for Afghanistan. It is essential that the United Nations continue to have the resources necessary to achieve the objectives set out in the resolution. The NATO Summit, to be held in Warsaw on 8 and 9 July, and the Brussels conference on Afghanistan, to be held on 5 October, must reaffirm the international community's support to Afghanistan and the process that led to the National Unity Government.

In conclusion, allow me again to pay tribute to the work carried out by Nicholas Haysom as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNAMA and to wish him much success in his future duties. France is pleased to continue to cooperate very closely with his successor, Mr. Yamamoto.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Sweden.

Ms. Söder (Sweden): Let me begin by joining the members of the Council in extending my sincere condolences to the peoples of Afghanistan, India and Nepal for the tragic loss of lives caused by the Taliban attack yesterday in Kabul.

Let me thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/532) and not least Special Representative Haysom for his briefing and all his endeavours. I

would also like to take this opportunity to thank him for his outstanding service in Afghanistan and to wish him very good luck in his new position. We also join others in welcoming incoming Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto, who will have our full support in his important mission.

Sweden aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and would like to make some additional remarks, mainly on the responsibility and role of the international community.

Together with the Afghan National Unity Government, which has our full support, the international community should continue to invest in sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Success will require addressing the root causes to achieve peace, security and development, with strong partnerships and national ownership. We know that very well, since our assistance to Afghanistan dates back more than three decades, all over the country, with a focus on education and health, women and girls.

Now we, the international community, stand before two important milestones this year: the meeting of the NATO Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, to be held in Warsaw in July, and the donor conference to be held in Brussels in October. At these conferences, the future of the international community's support to Afghanistan will be determined. Predictable and sustainable funding is a prerequisite for success. We have already declared our substantial long-term commitment, with the ambition of contributing approximately $1.2 billion during the transformation decade, 2015-2024. We encourage all countries that have been engaged in the region, and the wider international community, to stay committed and to join us in this long-term approach. Sustained assistance to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces is also needed. Sweden participates proudly in the Resolute Support Mission.

The continued implementation of essential reforms, as stipulated in the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, is necessary. Respect for the Afghan Constitution is key, and we encourage the Afghan Government to continue reaching out to a broad political base. Additional measures to counter corruption and the illicit economy are particularly important. All of these are critical to building a viable democratic society and increasing confidence in the Afghan State.

As we have heard, today security remains a basic and serious concern. We are particularly disturbed by the high number of civilian casualties and internally displaced persons recorded in 2015, and by the fact that the situation persists. The humanitarian situation in the country continues to present serious challenges and, as always, women and children are the most affected. All actors need to make sure that civilians are afforded protection in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We all long for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Therefore, we welcome the efforts made so far throughout the year, most notably the work conducted by Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, and the clear ambition of President Ghani and the Afghan Government to invite the Taliban to the negotiating table. We encourage the Government to continue on this constructive path. We of course stand ready to support the process if called upon.

The sustained engagement of the countries of the region is also essential. A conducive regional environment is very much needed. We are particularly pleased by the formation of a new High Peace Council and by the fact that several women are included in the new structures, including as a Deputy Chair. We strongly believe that women's inclusion in a potential peace process will greatly enhance the likelihood of a successful outcome.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to play a crucial role in supporting the Afghan Government. Moreover, the Mission and its leadership have been decisive to efforts for peace, stability and development in the country, as well as an important facilitator of dialogue and discussion within the international community. We support the important role of UNAMA with regard to humanitarian access, the promotion of human rights and in providing good offices in support of the peace process. UNAMA will remain essential to the international engagement in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future.

Let us recognize that much progress has been made in Afghanistan in the past decade, yet the challenges require our continued attention and we must take a long-term approach. As I said earlier, we have provided

assistance for a very long time — indeed, many decades. The Afghan Government and people can certainly count on Sweden's ongoing support in their quest for a peaceful and more prosperous future. The international community cannot afford to forget about Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy.

Mr. Amendola (Italy): Allow me first, on the occasion of his last briefing in his current capacity, to join others in their unanimous expressions of appreciation and gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Nicholas Haysom for his outstanding work and passionate commitment as Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) during a delicate period in the history of Afghanistan. Of course, we give our support the new Special Representative Yamamoto. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/532).

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union and wishes to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

As the Afghan Ambassador has already underlined, Afghanistan's security and stability are still under threat from the ongoing violent attacks of the Taliban and other hostile insurgent groups. We condemn in the firmest possible terms those barbaric acts, such as yesterday's attacks in Kabul and in Badakhshan. An unprecedented number of civilian casualties in the conflict have been documented by UNAMA, with nearly 2,000 civilian victims in the first quarter of 2016 alone. It is particularly worrying that children represent almost one-third of all victims.

Internally displaced people and flows of Afghan migrants have considerably increased, also as a result of the precarious economic scenario. Against that challenging backdrop, I wish to reiterate the full Italian support for the efforts of the Afghan National Unity Government towards peace and stability and to defend the gains achieved in Afghanistan in the past 15 years in terms of democracy, basic freedoms, human rights and women and girls' education.

The purpose of Italy's participation, as a framework nation for the Western region, in the Resolute Support Mission is to provide training and assistance to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces together with NATO members and other partners. The security forces are carrying out their task to protect their country and its people with great courage and sacrifice.

A long-lasting peace in Afghanistan will hardly be sustainable without a political solution. To that end, effective collaboration among all regional players is pivotal. Terrorism is a global and destabilizing threat. We therefore support all diplomatic efforts, such as those undertaken by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, aimed at creating the conditions for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, by engaging neighbouring countries and establishing constructive dialogue.

That process cannot stop, because a failure in the peace process could endanger the achievements gained over the years in the sphere of human, civil and social rights, particularly for women and girls — as has been stated already — reflected in the Afghan Constitution. That is one of the pillars of Afghanistan's democratic growth and partnership with the international community. We also encourage and support initiatives for interconnectivity, trade and infrastructure projects aimed at fostering economic integration and cooperation in the region, which would significantly contribute to the development and prosperity of the region as a whole.

Afghanistan is the first beneficiary of Italy's development aid, and reducing the country's structural connectivity gaps represents one of the main goals of our cooperation. This is the first priority of our effort in a Mission that is the second-largest in terms of foreign contingents.

The Afghan Government has started a reform process that we support. It is fundamental to Afghanistan's democratic consolidation and self-reliance. Progress in sectors such as the rule of law, the fight against corruption, economic governance, electoral reform and respect for human rights, women's rights and women's empowerment is essential. We therefore commend the Government's determination and commitment to reform and the encouraging results obtained, such as increased fiscal revenues, key appointments and new measures to fight corruption. We look forward to further tangible achievements based on mutual accountability principles.

As we approach the Brussels conference on Afghanistan in October, further progress in the Afghan Government's reform and governance agenda, combined with the sustained support of the international

community, will be key to ensuring sustainable growth and prosperity for Afghanistan and its people. As Nicholas Haysom said, peace is not a luxury, but a necessity. I think, as we all think, that we must advance on that path.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Thoms (Germany): Let me begin by thanking Mr. Nicholas Haysom for his briefing and for his outstanding leadership at the helm of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). During his tenure as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and prior to that as Deputy Special Representative, he has played a key role in bringing the international community together to support Afghanistan, especially at pivotal moments such as the latest presidential elections.

Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Germany is committed to continuing its support for Afghanistan, together with its international partners and in close cooperation with the Afghan Government. Under the chairmanship of our Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the International Contact Group reaffirmed this support at its most recent meeting, held in Istanbul on 5 June. Afghanistan in turn needs to make substantial progress on the agreed reforms before the Brussels conference in October.

The implementation of electoral and economic reforms, as well as the fight against corruption, are at the heart of the Mutual Accountability Framework. The Afghan people and international community deserve to see tangible results in these areas: reforms to bolster the private sector, the creation of job opportunities and a clear and realistic timetable for electoral reform and parliamentary elections, which also need to be communicated to the Afghan people.

All actors in the Afghan political system bear a responsibility to implement the reforms, as the National Unity Government enters its third year in office this fall. In that context, we commend yesterday's decisions by the Afghan Parliament to confirm the appointments of Acting Director Muhammed Masoom Stanekzai and Minister of Defence Abdullah Khan Habibi. Those decisions send out an important signal of national unity. Visible progress on the political and economic reform agenda is the only ground on which to justify to donor constituencies the exceptional level of support to Afghanistan.

The need for economic and political reform brings me directly to my second point — migration. Afghan migrants were the second-largest group of asylum seekers in Germany in 2015. Overall, the German authorities registered around 154,000 Afghans last year. This is a cause of grave concern to us also in light of our long-standing effort to help stabilize Afghanistan. Since the start of this year, another 38,000 Afghan nationals have arrived in Germany. In this situation, it is crucial to make quick progress in reducing migratory flows. It is in our joint interest that young Afghans can see a future in their own country. We note Afghanistan's commitment to honouring its international obligation to readmit nationals who are not in need of international protection.

An inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process remains the only viable path to a sustainable solution of the conflict. There is no exclusively military solution. Although talks with the Taliban remain elusive, there is much that Afghanistan and its partners can do to lay the groundwork. It is absolutely crucial that doors remain open. In that regard, we support all efforts of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group and others.

In our view, progress will be possible only if all key stakeholders in peace in Afghanistan, especially the countries of the region, unite around basic common positions and the joint endeavour. Negotiations with Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin are a welcome development, and a successful outcome would send a strong positive message.

We are highly concerned by the high toll that the conflict continues to take on Afghan civilians after the record number of civilian casualties registered last year. Children suffer particularly from the continued brutality of the conflict. As the Secretary-General notes in his recent report on children and armed conflict (S/2016/360), the number of children killed or maimed in Afghanistan rose by 14 per cent last year — an abhorrent and highly worrisome development. While the vast majority of those casualties are caused by non-State actors, the Government can do more to protect children as well. We are encouraged by the Government's proactive engagement with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; at the same time, there is an urgent need to implement the agreed commitments.

Another area in which we hope to see more progress before Brussels is women, peace and security. The adoption last year of the national action plan on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), and the recent symposium on Afghan women's empowerment in Kabul, sent the positive message that women have made great strides in Afghanistan over the past few years as parliamentarians, doctors or businesswomen. But again, implementation of the national action plan is key; for instance, Germany hopes to see, as agreed, the swift roll-out of prosecution units specialized on violence against women and girls in 26 provinces this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank UNAMA and Nicholas Haysom personally for their excellent work in the area of human rights, especially in the monitoring of violations against children in the Afghan conflict.

Germany joins all of Afghanistan's friends and partners in sending the clear message that we will not abandon Afghanistan at this critical time. Germany remains committed to supporting Afghanistan, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank you, Sir, for organizing today's debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Nicholas Haysom for his briefing, which I understand is perhaps his last in his present capacity. We wish him luck in his future endeavours.

We express our appreciation for the important statement made by Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal of Afghanistan. We offer our sincere condolences over the loss of lives and property in the bomb attack on 20 June in Kabul, in which some 20 people — not only brave Afghans, but also Nepalese and Indians — lost their lives.

While there has been no dearth of effort on the part of the Government and people of Afghanistan, as well as the international community, we note that the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated. Since the beginning of the year, the Taliban have continued attacks at an unprecedented rate, and there is ongoing violence by other armed groups. As per the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/532), armed clashes increased this year as compared with the same period in 2015. This situation has put renewed focus on the need for enhanced engagement and action by the international community. The Security Council needs to look into the deteriorating security situation and the means to contain it, as it could pose serious threats to the gains made by the people of Afghanistan in the past 15 years.

Groups and individuals that perpetrate violence against the people and the Government of Afghanistan cannot have safe havens and should not be allowed to exercise control and wield influence over any part of Afghanistan's territory. In our view, that is critical for lasting peace in the country. The effective implementation of the Security Council sanctions regime, including that established pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015), concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals groups undertakings and entities, should also be carried out consistently and with perseverance for it to serve as a strong deterrent to the listed entities and individuals. Also, it is sheer folly that the leader of a proscribed entity is not yet designated as a terrorist individual. As pointed out by the Representative of New Zealand, we need to address that matter forthwith.

Afghanistan has our full support in strengthening its defence capabilities to preserve its unity and territorial integrity, as that is the most important antidote to the worsening security situation in the country. On 4 June, the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi, and the President of Afghanistan, Mr. Ashraf Ghani, inaugurated the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam. As Prime Minister Modi mentioned then, "India's capacity may be limited, but our commitment to Afghanistan is without limits."

On 23 May, India, Afghanistan and Iran also signed the Chahbahar trade and transit agreement, which we hope will provide a new path to prosperity and reliable access to Afghanistan.

We are strongly committed to supporting Afghanistan in various plurilateral and multilateral forums. India looks forward to hosting the Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference in December. We welcome the cooperation of participating countries as well as supporting countries and organizations for the Ministerial Conference and related events in the

political, security, economic, connectivity and cultural spheres, to be organized in the run-up to the Conference.

We believe that the path to reconciliation in Afghanistan should be through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process that respects the red lines drawn by the people of Afghanistan and the international community, especially the ones regarding giving up violence and abiding by the Constitution of Afghanistan. The ideas and philosophy of understanding and reconciliation have deep and ancient roots there. I am reminded of a famous son of the Balkh region — the Sufi poet Rumi — who as far back as in the thirteenth century said, "I always thought that I was me — but no, I was you, and never knew it".

We applaud the role of UNAMA in providing assistance in the various sectors of Afghanistan's transformation decade.

I conclude by recalling the words of Prime Minister Modi when he said that for many others their commitment may have a sunset clause, but India's relationship with Afghanistan was timeless. We would like to reiterate our strong commitment and faith in the will of the brave people and the Government of Afghanistan to have a peaceful, prosperous, united, inclusive and democratic nation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/532) and Special Representative Nicholas Haysom for his briefing. We wish him Godspeed in his future endeavours.

At the start, let me condemn the attacks in Kabul and Badakshan.

Also, at the very outset, I reject the unjustified, untrue and gratuitous comments made by the representative of Afghanistan in casting uncalled-for aspersions on my country and its State institutions. The international community is well aware of, and acknowledges, Pakistan's contribution to and sacrifices in countering violent extremism and terrorism.

This is indeed a sombre moment for the people of Afghanistan, for the region and for the international community, which has invested so much blood and treasure to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan. The Secretary-General's report observes that there has been no significant improvement in the political, security and economic situation in Afghanistan. On the contrary, attacks by insurgent groups have intensified, economic opportunity is absent, the reconciliation process is frozen, hopes for peace are waning, and the confluence of those factors has magnified the suffering of the people of Afghanistan and the threat to regional peace and security. The Warsaw Summit and the Brussels conference will be further opportunities for the international community to provide the support that Afghanistan obviously needs to overcome those multiple challenges to peace and development. Yet, ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Afghan Government to deliver on the commitments to its own people.

In his report, the Secretary-General expresses and reinforces the firm international consensus that only by a negotiated political agreement will Afghans achieve sustainable peace. That is precisely what my country has long proposed as the only course to end the decades of war and suffering in Afghanistan. Based on that belief in a negotiated peace, and in response to repeated requests from President Ashraf Ghani, Pakistan agreed to facilitate the first-ever direct peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Afghan Taliban in Murree in June 2015. That was a promising start to a process aimed at ending Afghanistan's long night of conflict. Unfortunately, days before the second round, in which the two sides were to also consider a de-escalation of violence, the talks were scuttled by developments that are well known.

Another period of concerted efforts led to the establishment of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group in December 2015 in Islamabad, by which Afghanistan, the United States, China and Pakistan undertook to join together to provide decisive impetus to Afghanistan's peace efforts. The international community welcomed that development. The Group held five meetings in which a road map for a peace process was drawn up. In its meeting of 18 May, the Group agreed that a negotiated settlement was the most viable option. Efforts by Pakistan and others were under way for the early resumption of the peace talks. Despite posturing by both Afghan parties, a revived dialogue seemed to be within reach.

That process was destroyed by the United States drone attack of 21 May, which killed the Taliban leader, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor. Is it an accident that, in less than a year, the possibility for a negotiated peace in Afghanistan has been scuttled? The United States drone strike on our territory was a blatant violation

of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and a blatant breach of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law. That unacceptable action also dealt a blow to the Afghan peace process and added to the intensity and complexity of the Afghan conflict. It has raised serious questions. Does the international community desire a negotiated or a military solution in Afghanistan? Is it ready to invest in war rather than peace in Afghanistan? The use of force for the past 15 years has failed to stabilize Afghanistan. Continued resort to military means will further destabilize the situation in our neighbour and in our region. Pakistan would advise against such a strategy.

Other than Afghanistan, over the past 35 years Pakistan has suffered more than any other country as a result of foreign intervention, conflict and terrorism within Afghanistan. Several thousand Pakistani civilians and security personnel have died at the hands of terrorists.

Let me make it clear what Pakistan's policies and priorities are. First and foremost, we will eliminate all terrorist threats within Pakistan. Pakistan's Operation Zarb-e-Azb is the largest and most effective anti-terrorist campaign anywhere in the world, involving over 180,000 members of our security forces. In two years, that Operation has made substantial gains in cleansing our country of terrorism. Our Operation will continue until our objectives have been accomplished; those objectives will not be fully met until the sanctuaries and safe havens of terrorists who have fled to Afghanistan have been eliminated. We urge the Government in Kabul and the international coalition there to take action against the militant Tehrik-i-Taliban elements that have sought refuge in Afghanistan.

Secondly, it is self-evident that effective border control and management are vital to preventing the move of militants across the 270-kilometre Pakistan-Afghan border. Pakistan proposed a number of border standard operating procedures to Afghanistan two years ago; they still await finalization, as does Pakistan's proposal to establish a joint border commission. Effective border management is a sovereign right of my country. Pakistan will take measures on its side of the border accordingly. It is disingenuous to characterize steps aimed at regulating the border and curbing the flow of immigrants as illegal. There is nothing — I repeat, nothing — illegal about any construction on our side of the border.

Thirdly, we have the related problem posed by the 3 million Afghani refugees who remain on my country's soil after 35 years. Our hospitality and challenges in hosting the most protracted presence of refugees anywhere in the world needs to be, at the very least, appreciated and supported by the international community. But we also expect that tangible steps will be taken for the early return of refugees to their homeland with honour and dignity.

Finally, Pakistan remains ready to support a genuine Afghan peace process, but we will not tolerate violations of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity from any source. Those who seek a renewed recourse to military solution need to rethink the consequences of their position. Further, we would urge the Government of Afghanistan not to externalize its internal problems and blame others for its own failures and omissions.

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group remains a viable mechanism to promote a genuine peace process, but that process will have to be pursued with patience and perseverance. Success will be assured only when the Afghan parties themselves come to the conclusion that there is no military solution to the Afghan war and that peace can be achieved only through a non-conditional dialogue that will require difficult compromises on both sides.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): Let me first extend my condolences to the people and Government of Afghanistan for the loss of lives caused by the Taliban terrorist attacks in Kabul yesterday.

I would like to express my appreciation to France for organizing this debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement, as well as Mr. Nicholas Haysom for his briefing and introduction of the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2016/532). We wish him all the best in his new assignment, and welcome Mr. Yamamoto as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

My Government is concerned over the volatile situation in Afghanistan, which continues to face major security, economic and political challenges.

The Secretary-General's report refers to "continued and intense armed clashes, which were at their highest number recorded since 2001" (*S/2016/532, para. 3*) as the lead factor contributing to the deteriorating situation in the country. Also distressing is the uncertainty over the prospects for direct talks between the Government and the Taliban. We condemn all violent attacks committed by the Taliban and all other terrorist groups, as well as any cooperation with them, which we believe would encourage them in their odious behaviour and would thus be counterproductive to establishing peace in Afghanistan. Iran reiterates its support for any Afghan-led peace process.

At the same time, the emergence of Da'esh and its offshoot, the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province, along with a spectrum of other terrorist and extremist groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the north and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, are all alarming signs of more trouble in the future if we fail to properly address them now.

Today, the Afghan National Unity Government is at the forefront of fighting terrorism. The sustained support of the international community is sorely needed to shore up the Afghan Government in its fight against terrorism and extremism and to address the security, economic and political challenges that it faces. Strengthening regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major path towards consolidating peace and security in the region. We see great potential in our economic cooperation with Afghanistan and are ready to increase bilateral cooperation, particularly on security matters and counter-narcotic efforts, developing projects and economic cooperation in the fields of infrastructure and agriculture and finding durable solutions for Afghan refugees.

During the past decade, Iran has helped Afghanistan to complete nearly 300 projects, ranging from infrastructure to human resources training and capacity-building, particularly by offering of hundreds of scholarships each year. On 23 May, the Presidents of Afghanistan and Iran and the Prime Minister of India signed the Trilateral Transport and Transit Agreement in Tehran to facilitate trade among the three countries and, potentially, Central Asia. The Agreement covers the development of the Iranian port of Chabahar, which would provide Afghanistan with access to the high sea, which would be very valuable to Afghanistan as a land-locked country and the entire region. Iran and Afghanistan are also committed to increasing their connectivity, with emphasis on the Khaf-Herat railway, the 78-mile railroad project in Farah and the second bridge over the Helmand River. A planned trilateral Afghanistan-Iran-India transit corridor is also under way.

Narcotics are a real threat to the region and beyond and should be addressed by the international community in a serious and comprehensive manner. Any increase in narcotics use is a reflection of prevailing insecurity and poverty. The strong support and commitment of international donors, Afghan authorities and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime are essential to deter the menace of narcotics as a social health challenge and, more importantly, as a major source of income for extremist and terrorist groups.

With regard to refugees, Iran continues to participate in the work of the Tripartite Commission in order to plan for the voluntary, safe, dignified and gradual repatriation of Afghan refugees. It is very unfortunate to learn from the Secretary-General's report that 2016 represents the lowest recorded returnee rate since the establishment of the voluntary return programme in 2002, with many of the returnees choosing not to return to their areas of origin, including many who settled in urban centres. We welcome any effort to help overcome the main reintegration challenges faced by returnees and to formulate a comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration strategy. Success in voluntary repatriation depends first and foremost on addressing the reasonable needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan, which underscores the necessity of mobilizing more international support for this purpose.

Over the past few decades, we have supported and continue to support millions of Afghan refugees, who have not been confined to camps and have had free access to Iran's job market, despite the difficulties that the country has faced. This year, 386,000 Afghan students are enrolled in our schools and universities, which represents an increase of 36,000, thanks to the Government's decision to enrol all children, regardless of their legal status. In the field of health care and medical services, Afghan refugees continue to have access to public health services in the country.

Iran continues its full support for the promotion of security, stability and comprehensive and sustainable development in Afghanistan, since we consider the security of Afghanistan to be the security of our borders

and the region. We support UNAMA and United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a genuine commitment on the part of the United Nations to a sustained partnership with Afghanistan, as set forth in final report of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan. We need to utilize the UNAMA mandate and its good offices to strengthen national institutions and capacities in priority areas requested by the Government.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): In honour of your presidency, Sir, allow me to thank you in French for the opportunity to speak at this debate on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

(*spoke in English*)

I align myself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2016/532), Special Representative of the Secretary-General Haysom for his briefing, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement. I express particular appreciation for the efforts, dedication, and commitment of Special Representative Haysom in support of the people of Afghanistan under sometimes very challenging conditions. We wish him all the best in Africa and will welcome incoming Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto in due course.

Let me address three issues: security, peace and the way ahead.

On security, the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan states unequivocally that the overall security situation has deteriorated since the beginning of the year. Only yesterday, as others have noted, at least 20 people were killed and many more wounded in attacks in Kabul and Badakhshan. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families, and we offer our condolences to Nepal, Canada and Afghanistan.

The increase in casualties among the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces is worrisome. I would therefore like to commend the courage of the Government and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in their efforts to provide security to the Afghan people. The continued support of the international community, including that of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, remains necessary in view of the threat. In this context, we recall the 20 May decision of the Foreign Ministers of participating countries to extend the Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016.

With regard to the peace process, recent civilian casualties have increased. This demonstrates the urgent need for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. Durable peace can be achieved only through Afghan-led reconciliation supported by an inclusive regional process. We therefore commend the continued commitment shown by the region to the Heart of Asia process. We welcome the fact that the Quadrilateral Coordination Group reiterated its commitment to the peace process on 18 May. The Netherlands stands ready to support reconciliation efforts if so desired.

On the way ahead, the international community has been engaged in Afghanistan, in collaboration with the Afghan Government, for over a decade. Together, we have seen some very positive results in terms of development. Service delivery of health care and education has improved drastically since 2001. Women and girls actively take part in social life, and Afghanistan has witnessed a sharp increase in girls enrolling in schools. The Government of National Unity has shown its commitment to advancing its anti-corruption agenda. The Kingdom of the Netherlands especially welcomes the creation of a high council on governance, justice and anti-corruption, and particularly the establishment of a specialized anti-corruption court. The formation of these new bodies will strengthen Afghanistan's anti-corruption investigations.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has been a long-time partner of Afghanistan, and has contributed significantly in the fields of peace, justice and development. We remain committed to supporting Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade. In the run-up to the NATO Summit in Warsaw and the Brussels conference, the Netherlands is planning its post-2016 engagements, combining the three Ds of defence, development and diplomacy.

The Secretary-General's report notes that both the Afghan Government and the international community should sustain their attention and commitment, and work towards a better future for the people of Afghanistan. There needs to be a clear commitment on the part of the Afghan Government to implementing

the necessary reforms. The international community must offer the required support, taking into account the challenges facing Afghanistan. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to cooperate with its Afghan and international partners, as agreed in the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. We welcome the first draft of athe new Afghan National Peace and Development Framework, which we consider to be encouraging.

In conclusion, we, the international community, have a collective responsibility for stability and development in Afghanistan. The Netherlands will remain committed to Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade, in the context of increased Afghan ownership and leadership. In this spirit, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to support Afghanistan and its people as their partner for peace, justice and development.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): I should like to join others in thanking the Secretary-General for his report on Afghanistan (S/2016/532), the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Nicholas Haysom for his briefing. Australia is deeply grateful to Special Representative Haysom for his astute leadership, dedication and outstanding four years of service to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Afghanistan. We wish him every success in his new role as Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan.

We also take this opportunity to welcome and congratulate Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto on his appointment. Mr. Yamamoto has served with distinction as Deputy Special Representative, and we look forward to working with him.

Over the past three months, the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated, with armed clashes increasing in 2016. Terrorist attacks orchestrated by the Taliban have continued to inflict enormous harm. These include attacks against the media, the Government and judicial officials, killing and injuring hundreds of innocent civilians. We condemn in the strongest terms the brutal and reckless tactics of the Taliban in targeting civilians. We also express our condolences for the terrorist attacks yesterday in Kabul and Badakhshan.

The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have proven resolute in response to sustained pressure, and we honour their sacrifices. We also extend our gratitude to United Nations personnel and the international coalition for their tireless work to support the Afghan people. Australia reaffirms its commitment to Afghanistan and to assisting in defending its people against the insurgency.

In the coming months, the international community will meet in Warsaw and then Brussels to recommit to Afghanistan and chart the way forward to the year 2020 and beyond. In Warsaw, Australia will join international partners in committing to support the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, and in Brussels we will do the same to support Afghanistan's reconstruction and development. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to use this opportunity, created by the international community's collective support, to redouble efforts to implement its reform agenda. There remains much to do, particularly in countering corruption.

We welcome the Government of Afghanistan's support for gender equality, including steps towards addressing violence against women and implementing the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). Full implementation of the action plan and the law on the elimination of violence against women must be priorities.

The protection of children is also paramount. We welcome the recent progress made in preventing child recruitment by the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. We urge the Government to increase the oversight of child recruitment by the Afghan Local Police and to take further steps to implement the recommendations contained in resolution 1612 (2005). We further urge the Government of Afghanistan to work pragmatically towards parliamentary and district council elections being held as soon as is practicable.

Finally, let me express Australia's appreciation for the role that UNAMA plays in guiding and coordinating international efforts in Afghanistan. We look forward to continued cooperation with UNAMA and with the Government of Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Vrailas.

Mr. Vrailas (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States.

The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/532). I would also like to thank Special Representative Haysom for his briefing.

(*spoke in English*)

Let me start by reiterating our full support for the important continuing role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all of the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people and in coordinating the international community's assistance.

The progress achieved in Afghanistan is encouraging in many areas, but much remains to be done as progress has been uneven and remains reversible. The ongoing fragility warrants a realistic approach for the longer term and calls for the sustained and predictable support of the international community, based on the principles of mutual accountability.

As the Secretary-General highlights in his report, we have to meet important challenges, in particular in terms of the economic slowdown, with persistent high poverty rates; the struggle for political reforms, notably as regards the electoral system and a credible electoral calendar; and a security situation that remains a source of real concern.

Success will require concerted efforts, which depend on tangible progress in Afghan State-building through the continued implementation of the reform agenda of the National Unity Government; international support and sustained funding at or near current levels until 2020; increasing aid effectiveness in response to the new Afghan national peace and development framework and our lasting security partnership; and regional support for a political process towards stabilization, peace and reinforced cross-border economic cooperation.

A wait-and-see attitude is hardly an option and risks costing much more tomorrow than it might save today. The signal of our lasting, mutual engagement has real impact not only on Afghanistan but also on the wider region: on stability, on possible peace talks, on economic development and on migration.

Let me underline the need for the Afghan people, especially the youth, to be able to see a viable future in Afghanistan. In this regard, the capacity of Afghanistan's institutions to address the population's basic needs and to reduce poverty will be a determining factor. This will require the Afghan Government to promote sustainable economic, social and environmental development, including sustained job creation for women and men alike, while further improving governance, tackling drug production and trafficking, as well as further strengthening fiscal sustainability.

The first draft of the new Afghan national peace and development framework is encouraging. It is important that the framework focus also on the important issues of good governance, the rule of law, anti-corruption and human rights. Progress must be made with the new national priority programmes and the update of the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability framework. All three are linked and will be important deliverables in the run-up to the Brussels conference, to be co-hosted by the Government of Afghanistan and the European Union in October this year.

However, even more important is to cross the threshold from policy concepts to actual implementation, despite the difficult legacy that the National Unity Government is facing. Corruption in particular is a critical challenge in this regard, and the implementation of effective anti-corruption measures is of paramount importance.

Only a stable political and economic environment will help consolidate Afghanistan's nascent democratic institutions and promote the establishment of a reliable rule-of-law framework with safeguards to respect, protect and promote human rights, in particular women's and children's rights. Significant progress in this respect has been made in recent years in Afghanistan, but much remains to be done, in particular to ensure the full enjoyment of women's and girls' rights and women's empowerment at all levels of society, which is a priority.

In this context, I would like to highlight that substantial cooperative efforts will be necessary to address large population movements and the issue of irregular migration. They represent a severe constraint

for the development of Afghanistan's society and economy, as well as a pressing challenge to the region, transit States and the EU, where Afghans remain the second-largest group of arrivals in 2015.

Irregular migration is a real political challenge, and that is why the EU has made the offer of a new political framework to address this pressing problem: the Joint Way Forward. Effective cooperation on the return and readmission by the Afghan Government of its nationals, in full respect of their fundamental rights and in accordance with international commitments and obligations, is its central element. We hope to agree on and effectively implement the Joint Way Forward as soon as possible. The EU stands ready to support its implementation through substantial reintegration assistance so as to help create a conducive environment that can offer Afghan citizens opportunities within the country.

I would also like to briefly highlight the formidable challenge that minefields still pose for security and the socioeconomic development of the population. We call for a sustained demining rhythm and commend the work of mine-action partners and the Afghan authorities.

In this crucial phase, when we are heading towards the upcoming NATO summit in Warsaw and the Brussels conference on Afghanistan in October, let me stress that we have a collective responsibility for stability and State-building in Afghanistan and the wider region. Security and sustainable development represent interconnected challenges in such a State-building process, which needs to be underpinned by genuine political support within the region. A secure, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is vital to the peace and stability of the region as a whole. It is probably the best reason to join forces in the region, to set aside differences and to use one's respective influence with the parties to the conflict.

We need to promote a genuine and results-oriented negotiation process aimed at creating a lasting settlement that will provide the foundation for peace, security and prosperity both in Afghanistan and the wider region, and we know how important UNAMA's work is in this context. At the same time, it is imperative that any agreement not set back the rights of Afghan women and girls.

The EU encourages the multilateral efforts under way to support the Afghan Government in promoting a meaningful, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process as the only viable path towards the sustainable resolution of the conflict. It welcomes and supports the efforts undertaken by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group to create a conducive environment for such a process. Ending the armed conflict in Afghanistan is urgent and in the interest of all who seek development and stability, prosperity and peace.

Let me conclude by joining others in paying tribute to Special Representative Nicholas Haysom for his outstanding work, his personal commitment and his integrity, as well as his untiring energy in contributing to a better future for all Afghans, the sort of future that they both want and deserve. We wish him all the best for his new challenging assignment in Africa.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Vrailas for his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I wish to express my appreciation for this opportunity to address the Security Council.

Canada thanks the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its ongoing crucial work in Afghanistan and welcomes the latest report (S/2016/532) of the Secretary-General to the Security Council. Canada is also grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Nicholas Haysom for his briefing today and his years of service to advance peace, development and human rights in Afghanistan. We wish him the best as he takes up his new role.

Canada strongly condemns yesterday's terrorist attacks in Afghanistan by the Taliban, including the attack on the bus carrying security guards who protect the Embassy of Canada to Afghanistan in Kabul. I offer my sincere condolences to the families and friends of the Nepalese and Indian security guards killed, and I wish a speedy recovery to those who were injured. Many of the victims have been part of our Embassy family for years. They will be remembered for their service in the protection of the men and women at the Embassy of Canada to Afghanistan.

(*spoke in French*)

Improved security remains essential to Afghan stability today and to the achievement of its long-term economic and development goals. Afghan security forces have withstood considerable challenges as the

armed insurgency has grown across much of the country. The international community must continue to support the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in the face of this challenge. The NATO Summit in Warsaw in July will provide Canada, along with other NATO allies and partners, an opportunity to pledge continuing support to the Afghan Government and to stand against the violence and terrorism that is undermining Afghanistan's development and prosperity.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada supports an Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process and calls on the Taliban to come to the table and negotiate in good faith. Canada recognizes the importance of ensuring that the peace process include meaningful participation by Afghan women and the Afghan Government's efforts to ensure such through appointments to the High Peace Council. So much has been invested by the Afghan Government and Afghan women's groups to uphold women's and girls' rights that it would be a travesty to jeopardize them through a peace that would predominantly benefit only half the population.

We are encouraged by the positive steps that Afghanistan has made in recent years to promote and protect the rights of women, including stronger legal protection from violence, greater educational opportunities and more inclusion in public and political life. Canada welcomes the Afghan Government's initiative to develop a national women's economic empowerment strategy and a national priority programme. Sustainable development cannot happen without women's full economic and civic participation. However, those gains remain fragile and Canada calls on Afghanistan to press forward with the full implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women, as well as Afghanistan's national action plan on women and peace and security.

(*spoke in French*)

The promotion and protection of human rights, especially those of women and girls, continue to be a priority for Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. Gender equality is the cornerstone of all Canadian development programming in education, health, human rights and capacity-building for Afghan humanitarian assistance actors. At the same time, Canada's development assistance investments in Afghanistan's future serve to advance the rights, security and empowerment of all Afghans.

Canada remains concerned about minority, ethnic and religious rights in Afghanistan, as well as about the safety of journalists and the ability of the Afghan media to freely report the news. Recurrent attacks against minorities by insurgents and the repeated targeting of journalists by the Taliban are of particular concern. Canada calls on the Government of Afghanistan and the armed insurgents to uphold the human rights of all, including the freedom of expression.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada stands with the Afghan people as they strive for a more secure and prosperous future. We support the Afghan Government and its people in the face of challenging circumstances and welcome Afghanistan's efforts to counter an escalating insurgency, broker peace and pursue economic and social development. We call on Afghanistan's leaders to intensify their efforts to uphold and protect all human rights, in particular the rights of women and girls, and to sustain progress towards stability and security, accountability and self-reliance.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/532), Special Representative Mr. Nicholas Haysom for his briefing and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal for his statement.

The report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan fairly reflects our observations as well. The achievements of the past years in Afghanistan, including in the fields of security, democracy, governance, economic development and human rights, deserve to be acknowledged. Nevertheless, those achievements are not irreversible. Afghanistan continues to face challenges in all areas.

We would also like to highlight that, as observed during the official visit of Turkish Foreign Minister Mr. Çavuşoğlu to Kabul on 16 June, progress in every field is more visible. In order to maintain those achievements and to be able to build upon them, the international community's continuing support to Afghanistan during the transformation decade is of the utmost importance.

Turkey was pleased to host the International Contact Group for Afghanistan in Istanbul on 5 June. The attendance by 54 delegations at the meeting confirmed that the international community's support

for Afghanistan will continue. On the other hand, the National Unity Government continues its reform programme with a view to achieving self-reliance in the economic and security areas. At the Contact Group meeting, the participants shared the observation that the Afghan security forces are more resilient and performing better on the battlefield. However, the peace and reconciliation process remains a major challenge and should be put back on track. In that regard, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group's work needs to advance on the basis of the road map agreed by the parties.

We take this opportunity also to encourage both Afghanistan and Pakistan to continue their efforts to build confidence between them. The recent tension at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, which resulted in the loss of life, is clear testimony to the need for good neighbourly relations.

We believe that NATO's decision to continue with the current phase of the Resolute Support Mission is appropriate. We hope that the NATO Warsaw Summit and the Brussels conference on Afghanistan will show that the international partners of Afghanistan will maintain the level of their pledges.

I would like to stress that Turkey will continue to support Afghanistan's security and development efforts on bilateral levels and in multilateral platforms. We will stand by our Afghan brothers as long as our help is needed.

Before I conclude, let me join others in condemning the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and in expressing our deepest condolences.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.